I saw my country clearly like Neil Armstrong saw the earth in the cosmos on that first trip to the moon. PNG was caught like a butterfly in a spider's web struggling to free itself from the claws of modernization, deep-rooted corruption, poor governance and environmental devastation. I heard deep mourning in my country over the deaths of loved ones—the victims of AIDS, tribal war, cold blooded murders, motor vehicle accidents and lifestyle diseases. While the first kiaps and missionaries to my country still lived to be over 80 years—educated elites were dying young—in the prime of their lives. Why? I also heard the sound of women in distress from physical harm—rape, torture, sorcery-related killings, sexual abuse, exploitation, inequality, stigma and discrimination. Why?
I Can See
My Country
Clearly Now

Daniel Kumbon

Memoirs of a Papua New Guinean Traveller
United Kingdom, USA & Mexico City
DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to the memory of Lt. Barney Nelson, E A Markham, my parents and Uncle Wariaka. And to all my children and grandchildren - Penial Kumbon, Atu Benedict Kumbon, Dominica & Emmanuel Kumbon Roa, Forstina, Abiniko & Popene Martin and the un-named ones to follow
### CONTENTS

**Foreword**

i

**Preface**

v

**Colonisation and Independence**

1

Born Into a Primitive Society

2

My First Christmas: Fr. Gerald J Theis SVD, Rev Dr Otto C Hintze, Pioneer SDA Pastors & A Pastor With an Array of Guns

12

Against All Odds: The Success Stories of Two Village Girls & A Sibling Saves a Life

25

Sir Tei Abal a Founding Father of the Nation & the Aftermath of Independence

34

**In the United Kingdom**

45

Our Grand Adventure Was to Fly Over Those Mountains and Beyond

46

Life in Cardiff - Wales & Meeting ‘Wantoks’ in the United Kingdom

57

Archie Markham's View of Enga & Dying for a Drink

67

Women at Work and Poverty on the Streets of London and New York. And PNG?

72

Acid Rain, OK Tedi Environmental Damage & Softening the Impact of Change at Porgera

77
Conservation Efforts in the UK & the Sad State of the Great Kandep Swamplands

Norman Cathedrals, Thomas Cook, Flag Fen & the Rapid Journey of a Stone Age Highlands People

Lost and Found, Talking Space Travel at Cambridge University & My Neighbourhood Friends

**In the United States of America**

A Call of Black Kinship

Lt Barney Nelson – My World War II Veteran & Generous Americans

Flight of the Jews & Thomas Alva Edison the boy with the addled mind

Evil Music. Action Movies. Tribal Warfare & Cultures of Violent Death

**Photographs**

Clashing with Western Culture Head on & Population Explosion

Democracy or Not to Be – Lessons From an African Experience

The Slave’s House: Remembering the Cruelty of Man Against Man

Racism, Individualism & Making it Big in a Changing Society

Unexpected Loss: Sir Michael Somare’s Defeat at the United Nations & New York, the City of Cities

Zoos, Galleries & Museums: All Around the World in One Place

Country Roads Just Like Home

**Mexico City & Political Upheavals at Home**

AIDS: Confessions of a Sinful Life & Crying for a Vaccine in the City of the Gods

Losing a Relative to AIDS & Blight of Violent Rapes of Defenseless Women

Defeating the Culture of Corruption in PNG: Will ICAC Do It? And a Warning Against Complacency
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And the many colleagues I met in England (1989) United Staes of America (1991) and Mexico City (2008) – all of whose company I enjoyed as we explored this wide wide world together.
FOREWORD

There are few societies that have travelled from the Stone Age into the global economy of today as rapidly as the inhabitants of Enga Province in Papua New Guinea. Prospectors and explorers first moved through the area in the early 1930s, followed the Taylor-Black Hagen-Sepik patrol in 1938-9 and the establishment of a patrol post at Wabag. Isolated by World War II, most of Enga did not come under control of the Australian Administration until the 1950s and 60s.

The people of Enga had a cultural heritage that equipped them with the skills to adapt to the changes to come. Traditional values promoted hard work, competition, generosity and cooperation. Complex systems of exchange involving up to 40,000 people and the distribution of over 100,000 pigs were in full swing by the time Australian patrols first entered Enga. From such systems for the exchange of wealth to build social ties, Enga had acquired skills of complex networking, planning, timing and economic calculations necessary to join the global economy. Elaborate religious rituals united entire tribes and fostered cooperation.

Other Enga traditions made transitions rocky. When insult, injury and other disputes could not be solved through restorative justice, people turned to inter-clan warfare. This legacy remains today. Young men were strictly educated and disciplined by elders in the Sangai and Sandalu ceremonies that were effective in the past. However, they were discontinued with the arrival of missions and the opening of schools, leaving a serious void in the education of youths. Men’s and women’s houses separated the sexes, with men participating in the public realm and women relegated to the
domestic. This barrier is only gradually being dismantled today.

Daniel Kumbon’s journey begins in his childhood in 1955 with memories of a terrifying eclipse of the sun that brought darkness over PNG. The event was read as the end of the world. In a sense it was, for it marked the beginning of the eclipse of the world as the Enga had known it. Thereafter *kiaps* and missionaries arrived to build roads, churches, schools and health facilities. Daniel Kumbon’s account alternates from his memories of childhood to short vignettes that chronicle the lives, teaching and influence of missionaries whose dedicated work had lasting impact. Such local histories after contact with Europeans are not well recorded. Future generations will value information about these early agents of change, as well as glimpses into the lives Papua New Guineans who took advantage of opportunities and rose in prominence.

The narrative turns to Daniel’s journeys as a journalist to foreign lands and his impressions, encounters and reflections of his own society. While lost in London, he notes the value placed on life by the British in stark contrast to PNG where life is cheap and many lives are lost to accidents and violence. But he also deplores the many homeless begging in the streets and comes to appreciate the *wantok* system of his own country where the needs of individuals are spontaneously met by relatives. In Wales and East Anglia, he is confronted with environmental concerns for his country where resources are currently being harvested with little care about the impact on environments that appear so abundant. Environmental issues so concerned him that he planted 2000 trees on his land upon returning home.

Daniel encounters Dr. Paul Brennan when visiting Hawaii, a former linguist who worked in Enga for many years. Brennan’s displays of Enga material culture awakens his pride seeing artifacts from his isolated corner of the world viewed in the US. When visiting the birthplace of the inventor Thomas Edison, he marvels at his imagination and commitment. The museums of Mexico reveal the history of the building of a complex society; similar processes that were underway in Enga before Australian patrols entered there. He hears of the horrors of slavery in the US, something that could never have occurred in the more egalitarian and less individualistic societies of PNG.

The inevitable conversation arises in the US on relations between
the sexes, perhaps the biggest gulf between PNG and western Nations. Two African American female journalists question Daniel on polygamy and his two wives, teasing, provoking, curious and bemused about how intimate relations were managed in a ménage of three or more. The conversation turns from the private to the big picture questions about how PNG will manage its rapidly growing population in the future.

The problems that face PNG confront much of the western world as well: war, crime, corruption, drugs, AIDS, severe domestic violence and sexual assault. Daniel deplores the scale of such problems in PNG today and goes on to take readers on a brief journey into the lives of recent politicians and politics. His view is refreshingly objective in most cases, leaving readers to make their own judgments. His accounts do much to elucidate the challenges of moving from small-scale local leadership, where all actions are transparent to a full-blown democracy at a national level, particularly in a country that has experienced an unprecedented influx of wealth. How is such wealth to be equitably divided?

Wonderfully written, encompassing and full of fascinating detail, there is something of interest in this book for everyone. As future generations trace the history of their local communities, they will uncover much valuable information that would otherwise be forgotten. As the journey oscillates from foreign lands back to PNG, many valuable vignettes of traditional Enga culture and experience come to the fore, blending past and present. For the first time traveller to the western world, Daniel’s experiences provide signposts to navigate another world. Amongst these is the magic of the Highlands hat and *bilum* for eliciting conversation and congeniality from strangers on the street who have spent some time in PNG. The juxtaposition of approaches in the west to problems that confront all countries with those in PNG give serious food for thought. The discussion of politics and politicians over recent decades provides a challenge to see recent history from different perspectives. For newcomers to the country, Daniel Kumbon’s ambitious, animated recent history gives a sense of how current politics came to be as they are today.

Daniel ends with a sense of how long change can take and how many ‘restarts’ may be involved. His own effort to preserve his local environment and contribute his small effort to reduce climate change
by planting 2000 trees came to a halt with ravishing frosts and hungry pigs. In contrast Yasowa Kome succeeded after almost two decades of trying to establish The Yaskom Resort in the spectacular but war-torn high country of Sirunki in Enga Province. As with Yasowa, it will take time!

At the close of I can see my Country Clearly Now, a depressed resident of Port Moresby who had visited Cairns asks, “Why can’t towns in PNG be like Cairns?” The answer given is “Maybe because we have not really made the transition from primitive tribal communities to a sovereign nation state.” But would one want towns of PNG to be like Cairns? No. Indeed PNG has a long way to go in confronting problems of today such as corruption, crime, environment and violence against women. For this it can use models from other societies. But the cultures of PNG also have unique heritage, customs, celebrations, arts and above all open and supportive relations between people. It must draw on existing strengths and traditions, maintain its own character and synchronize them with a changing world.

Polly Wiessner, Professor of Anthropology, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.
I have set foot on almost all the continents on the face of the earth except Antarctica. Only I did not cross the Atlantic Ocean – and if I had I would have travelled right around the world full circle.

I started publishing a series of articles after my visit to England in 1989. I wrote more pieces after I won another scholarship to America. I compiled the essays in a book - beginning with my birth in a secluded bush hut. The bulky type-written manuscript was sent to many publishing houses with little success.

Only Oxford University Press adapted the first chapter and published it as a small supplementary reader for Grade 6-8 students in Primary Schools aptly titled *Climbing Mountains* - the story of my early childhood and struggle to receive an education.

The rest of the manuscript collected dust until I accidentally stumbled onto the PNG *Attitude* blog in February, 2015. I managed to get the second chapter published as a short story through Pukpuk Publications, an arm of the Crocodile Prize organisation.

The book, *Remember Me and Other Short Stories from Enga Province* was launched by the Education Secretary, Dr Uke Kondra on 18th September, 2015 in Kundiawa – the weekend following 40 years of independence celebrations.

I have reclaimed some material from *Climbing Mountains* and the whole short story from the 2015 book ‘Remember Me’ and republish it here as I had originally intended with new information added. This is my journey from birth to independence and experiences around the world.

My teachers at Kandep Primary “T” School said the world was round. When it was daylight on one side, people were sleeping on the
other side of the earth which was always spinning on its axis. I wondered how this was possible. At the time, young men from the village, including Uncle Wariak, were recruited under the Highlands Indentured Labour Scheme and taken away in huge aeroplanes. Where did they go?

Later, I discovered that they had been taken to Madang, Rabaul, Port Moresby and Bougainville to work on cocoa, rubber and copra plantations.

But the countries my teachers came from - France, England, Holland, Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and America were further apart, beyond big bodies of water. How did they visit each other?

My chance to fly overseas came in 1989, made possible by the British High Commissioner, His Excellency Michael Howell.

In 1988, when the High Commissioner came to Enga Province, Provincial Administrator, Mr Graham Taylor asked me to accompany him and his family to Anditale High School to visit British subjects teaching there. On the way, I gave his Excellency some copies of *Enga Nius*, the provincial newspaper. He quietly read through some copies, then asked me if I had ever received any overseas training. I never had, I told him.

Soon after, he sent me an application form to apply to the Thomson Foundation Editorial Study Centre in Cardiff, Wales. It offered scholarships to mid-career journalists from commonwealth countries. The rest is history.

After my UK stint, I won another scholarship to the United States of America in 1991 offered by the Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship program.

Another Washington based media organisation, The National Press Foundation offered me a third scholarship to Mexico City to receive HIV/AIDS training prior to attending the 17th International AIDS Conference in 2008.

I was inspired by hardworking people like Sir Peter Markham Scott the environmentalist, Dr Martin Luther King Jr. the freedom fighter, Thomas Alva Edison the inventor, Fr. Gerald Jerry Theis SVD the missionary, Herman Botcher the selfless WWII soldier, Lt Barney Nelson who after the war had owned or sold nine restaurants in Cleveland. I met or read about many other enterprising people who were the backbone of their countries.
They did not wait on their governments to provide them with funds or try to access funds through fraudulent deals – but utilised their own skills and resources for the betterment of humanity. I related more to the ordinary people of those countries than the rich and the famous, the people who made the decisions and possessed all the power and wealth.

I also write about Sir Michael Somare, Sir Tei Abal, Fose Kake, Jennifer Pyakalia, Alois Hemetsberger, Mathew Maineke and others – people I would wish the younger generation to emulate.

While Sir Tei Abal died in his old age, former member for Wabag, the late Takai Kapi’s demise was stress related. Communications Minister, the late Malipu Balakau was murdered. Then there is the mysterious disappearance of five research scientists from the Institute of Medical Research based in Goroka.

‘How could PNG afford to forget five young scientists?’ is the question I would like people to answer. And there is much violence, drug abuse and horrible road accidents recorded here too. But the irony is – the death and destruction could have been avoided if the people involved did not defy our laws or looked after their own health.

I also try to reveal the existence of resourceful citizens throughout the country, like Yasowa Kome of Sirunki, who are committed to developing their communities. Kome built a hotel in the midst of tribal warfare. His efforts were recognised by both the Enga Provincial Government and the National Government – a good example of how government can play a hand holding role to move the country forward.

To write this book, I have stitched together some of the best stories I have published over the years in the *Post Courier*, *The National*, *Sunday Chronicle*, Air Niugini’s *Paradise Magazine*, *The Plain Dealer* in Cleveland, Ohio, the *Charleston Daily Mail* in West Virginia, *PNG Attitude* blog, *The Crocodile Prize Anthology 2015*, *Enga Nius* and material from the two books, *Climbing Mountains* and *Remember Me*.

This is my personal journey from the time I took my first breath in a bush hut to independence and experiences around the world.

The observations I made and the conversations I had with ordinary citizens in those countries enabled me to see my country clearly like Neill Armstrong saw the earth in the cosmos on that first trip to the moon.
I saw PNG caught like a butterfly in a spider’s web struggling to free itself from the claws of modernization, deep-rooted corruption, poor governance and environmental devastation.

I heard deep mourning in my country too over the death of loved ones—the victims of AIDS, tribal war, cold blooded murders, motor vehicle accidents and lifestyle diseases.

I also heard the sound of women in distress and suffering from physical harm - rape, sorcery-related killings and torture, sexual abuse, exploitation, inequality, stima and discrimination. Why?

While the first kiaps and missionaries still lived to be over 80 years, educated elites from my country were dying young – in the prime of their lives. Why?

This is my personal story of how I see my province and my country and ask some questions in comparison to the rest of the world – warts and all.

Daniel Kumbon
Wabag, Enga Province, PNG

April, 2016
Colonisation and Independence

“In a new culture, we become more aware of what makes us different...a greater awareness of our ‘self’ and what is really important to us,” Gary Weaver, PhD Professor of International and Intercultural Communications, 1991.
Born Into a Primitive Society

I was born into a primitive and sometimes violent society. My childhood was never going to be secure - vulnerable to enemy attacks and diseases.

Killer frosts were another threat that destroyed food gardens and turned the picturesque valley with its pristine river systems and lakes into a lunar landscape. Many people died along the trade routes as they went in search of food.

My mother’s eldest sister, Baliwan Len had died at Rawanda village in the Aiyale Valley in Wabag during the 1948 major frost. I remember my mother cry often for her only sister. She had not been able to see her face on her death bed.

I could have even died at birth due to my mother’s loss of blood, thanks to an age-old custom enforcing seclusion during childbirth and allowing the amputation of newborn’s small fingers.

I am lucky I was born at exactly the right moment when the colonial administration brought peace to the area with an iron fist. They introduced better transport, health and education services from which I benefitted as I grew up.

“Don’t be disobedient my son. You don’t know how much pain I endured to bring you forth into this world. Only if you were a girl would you understand one day,” mother said every time I nagged her.

Both of us could have perished in a secluded makeshift bush hut. My dear mum was semi-conscious from loss of blood as she lay on the dirt floor. She was too weak to pick me up to feed and comfort me.

She was bleeding heavily, weak and in mortal danger. She had been struggling to give birth for several days. Only my consistent
crying alerted Aunt Alumali, who rushed over and rescued both of us.

My aunt had come from her husband’s village at Pindak mainly to help my mother during labour. She was cooking in the main family home a couple of metres away when she heard my desperate cries for attention.

Men and boys were not allowed near the small huts called *Pulim anda* when women were in labour or when female folk lived there in seclusion for five days during their monthly periods.

As a toddler, I often wondered where my mum disappeared to for days when she went to the small hut during her period. Women completely hid themselves from their spouses and male members of the family.

Menstrual blood was considered dangerous to the menfolk. It could render them useless and weak on the battle ground and get them killed easily.

Aunt Alumali found my face buried in the afterbirth gasping for air. She quickly picked me up and cut the umbilical cord with a bamboo knife and stuffed some sponge-like leaves called *koma* between my mother’s legs to stop the bleeding. With the same bamboo knife, she cut off my right-hand small finger to cleanse me of the stuff I may have swallowed.

As I cried out in pain, my aunt held me close to my mother’s young breasts full of clean fresh milk. Gradually, my mother regained consciousness and some strength to hold me close to her heart.

“I had to cut your finger to save you. You could have died if I was not there.” my aunt told me much later at Pindak village where I stayed at her house to go to school at Kandep Primary ‘T’ School.

She said I was a large baby and had subjected my mother to much pain. She had gritted her teeth and mourned for two days like an injured animal. She even swore never to conceive another child heaping all the blame on my innocent father. But I guess that’s what many women say in such circumstances.

On the third day of suffering, my mother had considered taking her own life by throwing herself into the menacing Lai River. It was common for women to commit suicide or die during childbirth in those times.

Menstrual blood and birth fluids were considered unclean. As the mid-wife, it was Aunt Alumali’s duty to purify me. So, with the least
hesitation, she had cut off my finger with the bamboo knife.

“You cried so loud, the foundations of Mt Kondo shook causing it to nearly come tumbling down to cover all of us,” Aunt Alumali joked. But she didn’t know that I could have died from loss of blood.

The stump on my right hand bears testimony to this age-old custom. But it was discouraged by the Australian Colonial Administration and missionaries who began to arrive.

Remembering the primitive conditions in which I was born and to show my appreciation, I bought a warm cardigan for my aunt as a 1972 Christmas present. I had earned the money by picking ripe berries during term breaks at Mukuramanda Coffee plantation run by the Gutnius Lutheran Church Missouri synod.

My cousin Simon Yanz bought one for his mother, Wipnonk, who was the second wife. My aunt and Simon’s mother were married to the same man. We were doing Grade 7 at St Paul’s Lutheran High School and we could not go home because of the major 1972 frost. Instead of wasting time, we picked coffee during term breaks to earn a little cash.

In 1955, my people were still backward and very much superstitious. They believed strongly that humanity would soon perish when a blanket of total darkness would cover their valley. They told each other to stay indoors to meet their final fate.

But they didn’t know exactly when that would happen – only the koneakali (white man) knew the time and date. And the people still went about their daily chores.

At nearby Gini village hundreds of pigs were slaughtered during the big traditional feast called the Yaei. There was plenty of pork for everybody to share around in my village. The feasting was disrupted when all of a sudden the birds and an insect called the nele started to recite warning songs and a sudden darkness covered the valley.

Soon stars began to appear in the sky and there was panic everywhere. Brave men began to yodel from ridge top to ridge top shouting, “Yuu koelyama aooo…yuu koelyama aooo.” The earth is ending, the earth is ending, farewell. Then there was no more shouting.

An eerie quietness covered the valley.

I remember my father standing vigil outside but then come back into the house to sit there stone silent. We all waited in fear to see what would happen next inside our oblong shaped bush hut.

I wanted to die with my mother so I held onto her tight. She was
breastfeeding my baby brother. After what seemed like an eternity, the sun reappeared. Normal life resumed but nobody could explain anything about the celestial phenomenon.

This happened on 20 June 1955 when there was a major eclipse of the sun. The line of totality began above the Indian Ocean, passed across Sri Lanka, curved over Indochina, northern Indonesia and the Philippines, continued swinging to the north of Papua New Guinea and ended over the south-western Pacific Ocean.

It was the longest eclipse since the eleventh century and there won’t be another like it until the twenty-second century. All of PNG saw a partial eclipse for many minutes with a maximum of about three-quarters of the sun’s disc covered.

I didn’t know all this until an article was published on PNG Attitude by Bob Cleland. He was the kiap (patrol officer) at Watabung, in the Eastern Highlands Province but on his honeymoon in Port Moresby when the actual eclipse occurred.

I can now confidently guess that I was about four or five years of age when the eclipse occurred.

The birth date I wrote down in my school leaver application form in 1975 is not relevant anymore. I was born into a society which did not keep time.

They ate and slept, made gardens, reared pigs, made love and produced children, fought tribal wars and buried their dead. They were lost in time.

Another major event that occurred was when the kiap came to my village at Kondo with a long line of policemen, interpreters and carriers to conduct the first major census in 1958. A pungent smell of soap accompanied their presence and remained in the village even after they packed up and left.

The patrol officer was the first white man or koneakali I ever saw. He was camped in my village at Kondo to conduct the census.

I remember my family – my sister, parents and myself going up to the table where the kiap sat in the middle of our village ceremonial ground to record our names in a book. My brother Nuamb, the baby boy my mother was breastfeeding during the eclipse, had died of pneumonia the previous year.

Like every other child in the village I had no clothes on. I was curious to see the koneakali, who was camped at the open singsing ground or Kama.
The *Kama* was packed tight with all the tribesmen. Nobody uttered a word. There was dead silence as people sat with their mouths agape staring at the government officials going about their duties.

They were all fearful of the menacing policemen with their guns who beat up people for the slightest disturbance like coughing when the patrol officer gave a speech.

When the village headman called my father’s name we went up to the table for our names to be recorded. It may seem odd but I did not feel any fear at all. But like any curious child, I asked a lot of questions in my head. Where did he come from? What does he eat? Does he sleep at all like normal human beings?

Numerous prospecting expeditions had penetrated some parts of Enga Province as early as 1930 but government patrols didn’t begin arriving in earnest until 1938 during which time an airstrip and a government base camp was established at Wabag, which is now the provincial headquarters.

In 1960 a government patrol post was established in Kandep. The *kiaps* had first tried to establish the post at Kalimanga, the village of my patrilineal grandmother but had moved camp down to Patuli village — to the present site.

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, agricultural officers, a new primary school, a jail and clinic.

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 for work 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.

All 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 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, who 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. I must have been over ten years of age. We children at that time did not grow fast enough and looked small due mainly to a lack of protein intake. There was no variety in our meals – it was always sweet potatoes served to us twice a day.

Pig meat was very rare. The only other source of protein was opossums, birds and insects. Fish were introduced beginning in the 1960s by the colonial administration. English potatoes, cabbages, water cress, pumpkins and other such vegetables were also introduced.

Mrs Moira Warr, who was my grade 5 teacher in 1970, recently recalled that some of us looked much older than what we guessed our ages to be.

“Also some students didn’t know their ages and they only guessed. One boy who looked about 15 thought he was about 12. I don’t suppose that happens so much these days but Kandep was a fairly new area in those times,” Moira wrote.

She was absolutely right. There were three boys and one girl in our class who were much older than any of us.

As soon as Kandep was derestricted by the colonial administration, there was a race between missionaries from the four mainline churches - Seventh Day Adventist, Lutheran, Apostolic and Roman Catholic - to establish churches, aid posts and schools among the people who still lived like their ancestors had done for generations.

Father Gerald Jerry Theis from the Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) came to Kandep in 1961 and settled among my people for eight years. I saw him establish a mission station at Kombames near Pindak village but later relocate it to the present day Mariant Catholic Mission.

The Seventh Day Adventists came and settled at Yakatetipaka, also near Pindak village. They were settled among Aimbarep tribesmen.

Norma and Victor Heinicke of the Lutheran Church Missouri
Synod settled at Kokas while Apostolic Missionaries started a mission station at Sawi on another side of the new Kandep government patrol post. They were operating among Ima and Alitip tribesmen.

Later the Lutherans established an outstation at my village of Kondo where a clinic was also built. I remember American nursing sisters coming from Kokas to treat the people during regular antenatal clinics.

My people had to either join the SDA’s, who did not eat pork, or join the Roman Catholic Church, Apostolic or the Lutherans who allowed people to continue to rear pigs as they had done for generations.

My parents joined the Catholic Church conveniently located close to our village. My mother was among the first groups to be converted to Christianity. And my people helped Fr. Theis build a church and school.

Fr. Theis was my teacher and parish priest. He gave me my first ride in a motorized vehicle - a converted World War II jeep. He had driven it down the Kandep – Laiagam road after it was built by the people with their bare hands.

Fr. Theis was visibly upset when one of his pupils, Elijah Etapae Yauk, now a retired primary school headmaster tried to jump off his moving jeep at Kimbalam. Elija was terrified to see the grass and trees swirling past him as the vehicle moved forward.

My father helped to build the airstrip and the four major feeder roads in the district – working five days a week under strict armed police supervision.

The very first kiafp to settle in Kandep was Jim Fenton. He was followed by Ross Allen and Dave Schupp. A cadet patrol officer who assisted them was Lloyd Warr. We children were afraid of them lest they locked us up in the haus kalabus. We were terrified of their large dogs too.

Many years later in 2015 on the eve of PNG’s forty years of independence celebrations, I was privileged to correspond with two of these kiafps - Jim Fenton and Lloyd Warr. Their text messages and old photographs brought tears to my eyes.

Jim Fenton wrote from Brisbane: “Sadly Ross was lost at sea about 12 years ago off his yacht while sailing from South America across the Pacific to Australia. It is believed he was killed by pirates. “Fr. Jerry, as you know, has retired to America and I am in
constant contact with him via phone and email. He always stayed with us here in Brisbane when travelling home on leave. Ross Allen's wife, Noeline, lives here in Brisbane and we see her often.

“I have many fond memories of Kandep, my favourite posting during my 23 years in PNG. Like all ex-kiaps we have never forgotten that beautiful country and its people. I am now 81 years of age but still have good health. I have just returned from a tour of Bhutan in the Himalayas and climbed to the monastery called Tigers Nest, which is built on the side of a mountain at an altitude of around 10,500ft – there is still a bit of muscle left in my old legs yet.”

Lloyd Warr expressed similar sentiments from Tasmania, where he lives with his wife Moira: “It was great to hear from someone who comes from Kandep where I spent a significant part of my early time in PNG. I first went to Kandep in early 1963 as a cadet patrol officer.

“I spent most of 1963 and 1964 working with the local clansmen building the roads into the Mariant Valley and from Kandep Patrol Post to Laiagam. At that time there was great excitement in the area with the people looking forward to the development that they hoped would follow the opening of the road.

“After serving in Wabag and Kompiam, I returned to Kandep as the Officer in Charge in 1969. I met my wife Moira in Laiagam in January 1970, a New Zealander teaching in Wabag. We were married in Mount Hagen in June 1970.

“Moira taught at Kandep School until the end of 1970 when we were posted to Kupiano in the Central District as it was called then. Later I served as ADC Popondetta before "going finish" in May 1975.”

Of the other pioneer missionaries and kiaps who came to Kandep, all except Fr. Jerry Theis had remained in PNG all their lives. He went back to Arora, Illinois in 2013 after 52 years of faithful service.

I had forgotten all about him until I was startled when his profile appeared on the computer screen. It was the type of information I hoped to find on the internet about another pioneer missionary, Pastor Geoff Given from New Zealand and other pioneer missionaries who had lived at Sawi Apostolic Mission not very far from Mariant Catholic Mission, where Fr. Theis lived.

Pastor Given’s young wife died tragically during child birth on 15 September 1965 but the baby girl miraculously survived.

Fifty years later in 2012, Lois, the girl, came to Kandep during the
jubilee celebrations of the CAF (Christian Apostolic Fellowship) Church.

Lois visited her mother’s grave and it was an emotional and unforgettable scene when she came upon the grave in a neat little cemetery on a slightly sloping hill beside the house her mother once lived in.

And now Fr. Theis looked at me from the computer screen. The six pictures which accompanied his profile brought back memories of how I must have looked like in the early 1960s.

Tears trickled down my cheeks as I looked hard to see if I could recognise any of the people. In one picture, Fr. Theis was flanked by his late parents. In another picture, the Holy Bible was firmly clasped in his hands.

My heart ached to see again the handsome bush material church I had seen Fr. Theis painstakingly build at Mariant in which I attended my first Christmas Mass at midnight.

After he left for Mt Hagen, somebody burnt it down for no apparent reason. This sort of wanton destruction remains a major problem in some parts of the country.

The main suspect, a young man from a nearby village, reportedly died of a mysterious ailment. Many people felt he deserved to die at such a young age because he had infringed on a traditional teaching which called for tolerance and to have respect for other people’s property.

We were told in the hausman to avoid such acts of wanton destruction and avoid people expressing their shock and anger by saying ‘esoo’.

“The utterance of this word can cut your life short,” the elders warned. “Conduct your lives in an appropriate manner so you can live long and grow white hair on your arse.”
My first experience of Christmas saw me fall asleep on a cold starless night on the bare earth in a hut at the newly established Catholic Mission at Mariant.

There had been much excitement as people talked about attending a Christmas mass at midnight to celebrate the birth of a man named Jesus, who was sent by God to save the world by dying on a wooden cross. But how was all this possible?

It sounded very much like a Kandep legend about a young girl who went to collect vines in the bush to make a bilum and found a nest with two beautiful eggs which she ate and became pregnant.

When her relatives demanded to know why she was in such a state, she honestly told them how she ate two eggs she found in the bush.

She bore a beautiful child unlike any earthly offspring and named him Lelyakali Kimala – the legendary super human being who protected poor and ordinary people from the harm inflicted on them by a cruel, one-eyed giant or evil spirit named Keoakali Takaupin.

I was looking forward to attending my first Christmas church service to see how Jesus was born in a manger. We children were tasked with gathering a dried pitpit called sambai kendole to use as torches during the midnight mass.

We made several bundles and tied them with vines and placed them to dry directly over the fireplace in the ceiling or iki of our houses.
When the much anticipated day arrived it seemed everyone in the valley was going to celebrate mass. The small track was congested with people carrying torches of burning bundles of *pitpit*.

The night air was filled with excitement and people greeted each other and shared jokes and laughter. There was the occasional sound of shrieking children as mothers tried hard to control them.

The Catholic mission at Mariant is situated on a hilltop and, as I climbed higher, I could see more people coming from all directions, their burning *pitpit* moving slowly along the bush tracks. It looked like a multiplicity of comets traversing the heavens towards a central location.

We arrived early so my mother took us to a small hut built by Elias, the mission carpenter. As my mother joined in the conversation, I soon fell asleep beside her on the bare earth. When I woke up, the bell was ringing signalling the start of midnight mass.

I followed mother into the bush material church. The place was crowded with many people from all the surrounding tribes. Two Coleman lamps lit the altar. Candles flickered like orange stars in the interior, which was decorated with fresh leaves, flowers and small bushes.

And there it was – the manger where a tiny figure lay. It was a waxen image of the baby Jesus. Mary and Joseph looked on as shepherds worshipped the new born king. A couple of sheep lay around the manger. This was what I had come to see.

I gazed at this wonderful sight and gradually dozed off. I woke up as my mother roughly pulled me to my feet. Christmas mass had ended and I stumbled through the door in a daze. Everything seemed like a dream.

I came to understand the meaning of Christmas when I started school. Fr. Gerald Jerry Theis SVD preached that Jesus Christ died on the cross to save humanity and all men should love their enemies, forget past rivalries and live in peace and harmony. On judgment day Jesus would take those who obeyed him to heaven.

This was a new religious concept taught to people whose sworn enemies were the neighbouring tribes. Since time immemorial they had always fought and worshipped objects like decorated stones, carvings, hand-woven *Yupuni* figures and ancestral spirits.

In the *hausman*, the elders instructed the youths to be on guard for enemy attacks at all times and conform to traditional teachings.
Relatives must never be abandoned or ignored when they needed help. It was an obligation to respect the elderly, be kind to others and help the poor. Pig meat had to be shared equally and the best bed and food offered to travellers.

“Conduct your daily lives in an acceptable manner so you can live long and grow white hair on your arse before you die,” the elders stressed. “If not you will die at midday and eat shit when the sun still shines.”

They told us never to sit among a group of people who were making plans to harm another man. “His blood will be rubbed onto you and inherited by your children,” they warned. ‘If you have grudges against one of your brothers, confront him openly.”

The elders said the sun always secretly witnessed what we did. They believed there was another super being called Gote in the heavens and offered pig and opossum sacrifices in a special offering called a goteman.

On the back of such initial teachings, people easily accepted Christianity and abandoned tribal warfare. They humbly followed instructions from the kiaps and worked hard to build roads, airstrip, schools, churches and the Kandep government station, often with their bare hands.

Like everywhere else in Enga, Kandep experienced total peace during the colonial period. The people went to church every Sunday and looked forward to Christmas. It was a time when many new converts were baptised and revivals and crusades organised. Sweet carols were sung, especially by the Seventh Day Adventists at Pindak village.

Even now, everybody who is a committed Christian makes an attempt to attend these activities. For others it is an occasion when they take a break from their regular life and completely cut themselves off from work.

However, when the New Year came around, people painted with black charcoal blocked public roads, burn tyres and beat empty drums - their minds skewed by liquor, homebrew and drugs.

Killings during festive periods have all been alcohol-related. Urban centres like Port Moresby and Lae see a surge in drink-driving accidents resulting in needless death.

This is all compounded by a resurgence in tribal warfare, armed robbery, bad governance, huge debts, corrupt contracts, broken
families, cult activities in schools, cold-blooded murder, HIV/AIDS, sorcery related tortures and killings, deteriorating health and education services and crumbling infrastructure.

Imagine for a while what PNG would be like if we grasped traditional teachings, respected authority, obeyed our laws and lived the decent lives our ancestors, *kiaps* and the early missionaries intended us to live!

Fr. Gerald J Theis received the call to be a missionary back in 1940. As a child he dreamed of becoming a stunt pilot, and as a hobby he used to build and fly model airplanes.

By the time he was 13 he felt called to be a Divine Word Missionary and started on the long years of study for the missionary priesthood.

When he was close to ordination, he was asked in what country he would like to work. His love for flying had not diminished, so he mentioned to his superiors that he had always wanted to be a pilot and would not mind becoming a flying missionary priest.

He could use an airplane to get around a large parish with remote pockets of the faithful. His superiors sent him to Papua New Guinea, where he would serve for the next five decades. He never became a pilot, but he moved around the mission in airplanes piloted by other Divine Word Missionaries.

Having arrived at his mission in 1961, he proceeded to his appointment in the Vicariate Apostolic of Mt Hagen. To get there, he was flown by Fr. Heine Hoff SVD in a small Cessna 180.

The first few months were devoted to the study of Melanesian Pidgin, culture, learning how to organise catechumens and ministering to baptised Catholics. Fr. Arnold Steffens SVD gave him those lessons.

While studying in the Mt Hagen area, Fr. Theis learned from great missionaries like Bishop George Bernarding SVD, Fr. William Ross SVD, Fr. Joseph Krimm SVD, Fr. Edward Misik SVD, Fr. John Labor SVD and Fr. John Dunn SVD.

Finally, with some basic knowledge of missionary work, he was assigned to the remote Kandep Patrol Post in the Lagaip Sub-District. The area had just been derestricted.

In this new area, he was still under the tutelage of an experienced missionary, Fr Willibald Blank SVD at Laiagam. There was a choice. Walk for two days to reach Kandep or fly by light aircraft. Fr. Theis
arranged to fly to and from Kandep every three months.

Kandep is 7,800 feet above sea level. From his bush house, without plumbing, electricity, telephone, refrigeration or even a stove for cooking, Fr. Theis would visit the 20,000 people of his area.

It took him six weeks on foot to visit the 53 places of contact. At times it was necessary for him to cross through mountain passes at 10,800 feet above sea level. The rainfall was high and he had to wade through swamps and cross fast flowing rivers on rickety vine bridges.

His people possessed a natural informal religion. Although it was animistic, it was nevertheless faith in a greater power. By careful analysis, Fr. Theis could explain that their faith was basic to formal Christianity.

Gradually, by explaining the Holy Bible, people began to accept the Faith and ask for Baptism.

Another great need of the people was to bridge the gap between stone tools and wooden digging sticks to formal education. Fr. Theis found a teacher and started a school. The following year he himself taught the first graders because of the shortage of teachers.

After spending eight years as a bush missionary, Fr. Theis was called back to Mt. Hagen. His Diocese needed an education secretary. In that position he served as liaison to government officials to obtain better wages for teachers in church schools.

He was a member of the District Education Board and also a member of the Governing Council of Holy Trinity Teachers’ College. Later on he became a staff member of the college.

In 1981 Fr. Theis was asked by Bishop George Bernarding SVD to again be the liaison with the government regarding work permits for foreign church workers.

He was also asked to begin a printing service to facilitate the teaching of apologetics. And yet another responsibility became caring for the health of the ailing bishop.

By 1982 Mt Hagen was an archdiocese. Fr. Theis continued in his roles as vicar general, chancellor, consulter and board of trustee’s member, all the while being chairman of the Governing Council of Holy Trinity Teachers College.

By 1988, after the retirement of Archbishop Bernarding SVD, the new Archbishop Meier SVD relieved Fr. Theis of the position of vicar general and appointed him once again as parish priest. He was pleased to return to more full time pastoral work and the training of
Fr. Theis was especially grateful to his many spiritual and material benefactors. His spiritual benefactors sustained him in many difficult situations through which he persevered for 52 years. And his material supporters helped him to achieve many charitable works.

Through judicious use of funds, he accumulated enough money to enlarge an old cramped church building. The refurbished church comfortably seats 1,000 adults. In St. Arnold’s Parish he was pastor for over 6,000 Catholics and more than 800 female boarding students at the adjacent Notre Dame Secondary School.

At the age of 81, Fr Theis celebrated his 50th Golden Jubilee (1962 – 2013) at Mariant Catholic Mission where he had started as a young priest. The festivities lasted for three days.

After that Fr. Theis returned to the United States in semi-retirement, but he was still available for whatever assignments are asked of him. When the time comes to join the Lord, he will be buried in his home town of Arora, Illinois, USA.

And one of the first two Lutheran Missionaries to set foot in Enga, Reverend Dr Otto Carl Hintze Jr 93 lives in Missouri. He also awaits the time when the Lord will welcome him to the heavenly shores.

In 2014, Dr Otto published a book From Ghosts to God in Enga Land which chronicles the challenges early missionaries faced in bringing the Word of God to the Enga people three years after World War II.

In 1947 the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod decided to send missionaries to Papua New Guinea.

“Then President Lois Sieck of Concordia Seminary called fellow seminarian Willard Bruce and me into his office and asked if we would consider going to New Guinea,” said Dr Otto. “So, God uses His Spirit to see the need for outreach, the place and who should go. He who sent a team of two ‘green horns’ straight from Concordia Seminary along with two experienced Australian Lutheran Missionaries from Siasi Island.”

So they came to Enga and established the first church at Yaramanda near Wapenamanda on November 2, 1948. From there they established congregations in the Tsak Valley, Sirunki in Laiagam and in other parts of the province including the establishment of their headquarters at Irelya - a few kilometres from the Wabag
government patrol post.

They successfully preached the Word of God to the people after learning their language and began to understand the people. The Lutherans produced a book *Studies in Missionary Anthropology* which was published in 1970. It is a collection of essays which explore different aspects of the people and their culture and how missionaries should fit into that web of established cultural activities.

They learned the Enga language, translated it and put into writing a language that had never before been written. With help from the people, the missionaires learned the complex spoken nuances of a non-Western tonal language that enabled them to deliver the Gospel for the first time in the Enga people’s native language.

“Today’s missionaries need to be trained also in learning and working with the mother tongue of those to whom they are sent. They need a course in cultural anthropology,” said Dr Otto. “They are to approach (the native people as a whole person, male and female, family by family, in loving Christian relationships to the community as a whole, especially to tribal people.”

Dr Otto and fellow Lutheran missionaries worked hard to improve all facets of life for the Enga. His book tells how the people’s education system, agriculture and economy all improved as they embraced the Gospel.

They built schools, hospitals and health centres, set up co-operative businesses, introduced animal husbandry and livestock, and built a hydro system to provide power to Mambisanda Hospital and the first high school in Enga Province at Pausa.

Chief Justice Sir Salamo Injia, Foreign Affairs Minister, Rimbink Pato, former acting Prime Minister, Sam Abal, Grand Chief Sir Peter Ipatas, KBE, former Lagaip-Porgera member, Philip Kikala, Provincial Administrator, Dr Samson Amean, Provincial Planner and former Administrator, the late Kundapen Talyaga were some of the people educated there.

In his book, Dr Otto recalls the challenges, missteps and even dangers he and his wife, Janelle, overcame in faith amid the austere, foreign conditions of the region and how those conditions improved significantly over time.

“God chooses very ordinary people who have strong faith in Jesus to be missionaries,” said Dr Otto. “God blesses whatever is done in love - even mistakes - to enable people to listen and have faith,
created by the Holy Spirit, in their hearts. Even in dangerous circumstances, God’s angels protect and provide what is needed.”

After 17 years as a missionary to Papua New Guinea, Dr Otto taught at Concordia Theological Seminary (then located in Springfield, Ill.); served on the staff of the LCMS Board for Mission Services; was pastor of Inreach and Outreach at Ascension Lutheran Church, St. Louis; and was chaplain at the LCMS International Centre in St. Louis.

Now, confined to a wheelchair in his home in Missouri he summoned all his strength and wrote to Rimbink Pato, the PNG Foreign Minister to reconsider his stand to ban American Lutheran missionaries from going to Enga Province to help people.

He wrote the letter on 3rd July, 2015 when he learnt that Mrs Julie Lutz and her son Anton Lutz were to be deported. And wife of Highlands Lutheran International School Chaplin, Dr Todd Luedtke, Jane was told to go back to Washington DC to get her visa because she had been in the province on a tourist visa.

But when she tried to get her visa in Washington, she could not get it because there was a problem at the Immigration Office in PNG. Chief Migration Officer, Mataio Rabura confirmed later that they had been banned from coming into the country.

The ban appeared to be in relation to a long standing power struggle within the Gutnius Lutheran Church between the followers of David Piso and Nick Ayane for the post of Head Bishop.

Concerning the deportation ordered against Mrs Julie Lutz and her son Anton, Rev Lintze said deportation is usually reserved for those who have broken the law.

“Julie and Anton broke no federal laws, but instead they tried to follow the laws of PNG and did many good things for the people of PNG,” he wrote.

Julie’s husband and Anton’s father, Dr Steve Lutze was a veteran medical doctor at the GLC-run Mambisanda Hospital for many years and died working there. Julie and Anton wanted to continue to serve the people.

“Also, for what reason has Mrs. Luedtke been denied a visa to return to PNG in order to help the country through teaching children good things?”

Dr Otto said the Gutnius Lutheran Church under Bishop Nick Ayane has always been ready to forgive Dvid Piso.
“I am writing this to you and David Piso in the hope that you will do the Christian thing of promoting peace in the GLC through confession, repentance and forgiveness – both sides trusting Jesus Christ.”

Thankfully, the two factions were meeting for the first time at the end of December, 2015 in a court sanctioned reconciliation process in an effort to unite the GLCPNG. National Court Judge, Justice Ambeng Kandakasi was arbitrating the proceedings.

Layman and christens hoped there would be reconciliation in the church through repentence and absolution and a new Head Bishop elected by a unified synod. The struggle for power in the GLCPNG has lasted for over 33 years in which time many bishops died needlessly supporting leaders of the two factions.

They included former Head Bishop, Dr Wais Waima, Bishop Philipo Paiakai, Bishop Michael Yakop, Bishop Leo Laku, Bishop Yapati Yoko, Bishop Pii Tondoa, Bishop Joshua Marai, Bishop Seke Nete and Bishop Karap Malipu.

This is not to mention the many laymen, missionaries and christens who perished wondering whose interest the leaders of the two factions were serving – The Trine God or for their own earthly pursuits.

Another Christian church denomination which has its roots in Enga province – the Apostolic Church which established its headquarters at Mamale village in Laiagam during the colonial period split up due to internal strife. The two factions now operate as the Christen Apostolic Fellowship (CAF) and Apostolic Church Mission (ACM).

The hearts of pioneer Seventh Day Adventist missionaries have also been broken by Enga people whom they had first met and settled down with to spread the word of God.

The first Seventh Day Adventist to set foot in Enga was a paramedic with the Australian Army Medical Services by the name of Laurence Gilmore. He patrolled to Wabag from Mt Hagen to assess a reported outbreak of dysentery in 1944.

Three years later in 1947, Pastors L. I. Howell and F T Maberly landed at the newly completed Wabag airstrip for their first exploratory visit to Enga. Then on October 14, 1947 the first teachers in Enga, Gomenis and wife Lydia came and started a school at Rakamanda.
On November 4 Pastor Frank Maberly returned with his wife Leila to start work among the Enga. The following year the very first classes started at the new primary school at Rakamanda. The first students included Timanao, Nakandege, Yagen and John Akalyanda.

The first recorded baptism took place also at Rakamanda on 25th July, 1953. The fiftieth year anniversary celebration of the SDA Church was celebrated by thousands of Christians from all over the country, Australia and New Zealand at Rakamanda in 1994.

Pastor Gilmore was still alive at the time but could not make it due to an old-age disability. Pioneer missionaries who came included Doug and Dawn Oemcke, Pastor and Mrs. Martin Pascoe and Len Bernard.

Mr. and Mrs. Pascoe were the pioneer missionaries who started the health clinic at Rakamanda. Mrs Pascoe said she was the midwife at the clinic and delivered about 900 babies under conditions unimaginable.

Recalling memories of the past, Pastor Gilmore said he could vividly remember how he walked from Mt Hagen to Rakamanda in 1957. The road from Mt Hagen had just been finished as far as the Lai Bridge, down the cliff from St Paul’s Lutheran High School and before reaching Wapenamanda township.

The first government vehicle to come to Enga had to be airlifted from Madang to Mt Hagen. It was then dismantled in Mt Hagen and carried on the shoulders of people - part by part - and reassembled again in Wabag.

By the time Pastor Gilmore left in 1966, Wabag was not yet much of a town by any standard.

“I am particularly amazed at how much Wabag and Rakamanda in particular has grown in such a short span of time,” he said.

However impressive the anniversary celebrations were, there was some hiccups which were seen by some elders as bad omens. When everybody stood to sing the national anthem, the PNG flag refused to flutter open. The Deputy Prime Minister, Chris Haiveta, Premier Danely Tindiwi and other invited guests had to remain standing for a while until it opened.

Then, when the official speeches began, the batteries powering the public address system went flat. Soon after, a whirlwind started to blow and centred around one particular tent and nearly tore it down.

The whirlwind in the Enga language is called the ‘devil’s wind’.
Some elders observing the celebrations predicted disaster would befall the Church.

The last event, which was the unveiling of the memorial stone, was an emotional one. Many of the faithful cried. Their tears mingled with a light drizzle that fell suddenly.

The elders interpreted this as nature weeping with the celebrants. They said this was also a bad omen and there would be sadness in the church.

Believe it or not - there was indeed sadness inside the church. Soon after, Rakamanda SDA Church and all the other property, including the impressive pastor's house built by the pioneer missionaries, was burnt to ashes during a tribal war.

The nearby SDA Church run Sopas Hospital and the first nursing school in Enga Province were forced to close due also to continuous tribal warfare there. The SDA Church at Pindak in Kandep – the district headquarters was also completely burnt to ashes during a tribal fight in the area.

It is only through Provincial Government intervention that the School of Nursing at Sopas was re-established as well as an elementary school built at Rakamanda - to start all over again.

The multi-million kina properties belonging to other denominations started by people like Reverend Dr Otto Carl Hintze Jnr, Fr. Gerald Jerry Theis SVD and kiaps like Jim Fenton, Ross Allan, and Lloyd Warr as well as all the other missionaries, teachers, planters, and government officials ought to be respected.

The country owes a lot to these pioneer kiaps and missionaries who risked their lives to come here and show the people a new way of life.

On the other side of the coin, a missionary who came decades later was an embarrassment to all the foreign church workers and the denominations he claimed to represent - the Baptist Union of PNG.

In 1993, missionary work was stained by a Baptist Church pastor who was jailed for eight months for having in his possession an array of firearms in his house at Wapenamanda.

Ron Conaway from Illinoi, USA was imprisoned at the Baisu Jail after being found guilty for having firearms in his possession.

Pastor Conaway was also fined K3, 000 in default of a three year jail term by the Mt Hagen District Court.

Police arrested him after he left the Mt Hagen Post Office with a
parcel containing eight pistols, ammunition and other accessories. He was attired in a Royal PNG Police Constabulary uniform complete with an uncommissioned officer’s cap.

Police then raided his Wapenamanda home and found an armoury with two shot guns, two high-powered rifles, an air-gun and a .22 rifle, four pistols, a crossbow, arrows and ammunition in large quantities spread all over his house.

Police Commissioner, Henry Tokam said the parcel containing the pistols had been detected by customs officers in Port Moresby but they decided to monitor it to its destination and alerted police.

The package, ostensibly an amplifier, had been consigned from New Orleans in the United States. The pistols had been concealed inside the otherwise empty amplifier.

Conaway told the court he did not know who had sent the package with the pistols to him. He told the magistrate, Patrick Nasa he had no idea the weapons were in the package until he opened it in front of police at the Kiminiga Police Barracks.

He told the court that of the firearms in his house, one shot gun and a .22 rifle belonged to his children and had been packed by friends without their knowledge when they were coming back from America in 1989.

Most of the other firearms had been sent to his address three weeks prior by an unknown person and he had been writing to America to find out who would have sent them to him. He was still thinking what he should do with the firearms when police caught him.

In connection with the firearms he received at the post office, he told the court, he did not know who had sent them and denied the charges of importing prohibited material and possessing the firearms in the package.

The Baptist Union of PNG denied that Pastor Conaway had any connection or association with the churches of the union, the Australian Baptist Society or the New Zealand Baptist Missionary Society.

Baptist pastors from Australia began witnessing in 1949 and started work in the Baiyer River area in the Western Highlands Province and extended their activities into Lumusa and Kompiam in Enga Province.

By 1956 the first public baptismal services were held at Baiyer
River and Lumusa. With their head office based in Mt Hagen, much needed health and education services continue to be provided for the rural people by the Baptist Church.

It was an embarrassment indeed for Pastor Ron Conaway to spoil the image of the Baptist Union of PNG when he was found guilty and imprisoned for keeping an armoury in a province synonymous with tribal warfare involving high powered guns.

Police had always suspected that the guns were smuggled across the Indonesian border or across the Torres Strait Islands from Australia in exchange for high grade marijuana. Otherwise they thought they had been supplied by wantoks from the disciplined forces.

But now there was undeniable evidence dangerous weapons were easily smuggled through an ineffective postal system.

Why should an innocent pastor in police uniform possess such an impressive array of dangerous weapons in the house of God? Did he need guns to convert people to Christianity?

And why have there been divisions in the Gutnius Lutheran Church PNG and the Apostolic Church which have roots in Enga province?

The answer is in the Holy Bible itself warning the faithful to be wary of the ancient destroyer - the deceiver who roams around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8).
Against All Odds: The Success Stories of Two Village Girls & A Sibling Saves a Life

My first teachers at the newly established government school at Kandep Patrol Post in 1964 were an Australian couple. I think their surname was McRae but can’t remember their names in full. I can recall Mr McRae showing us pictures of himself in a rugby team in Australia.

He must have loved sport, for he practiced golf on the green grass of the new government station grounds. He introduced cricket to us but many of us were afraid of the hard ball. Some of us liked playing baseball and soccer though.

The couple was assisted by two local teachers – a Jack from Finschhafen in the Morobe Province and Ignas from the Sepik.

I can remember Ignas throwing an empty fish tin at a group of us to stop us talking in class. It landed squarely on Mara Komaip’s face causing a deep cut spilling blood. He ran out of the door crying as loud as he could and never came back to school.

When I did Grade 1 the following year, I heard that Pastor Given’s wife had died. I saw the biggest gathering of expatriates and local converts gathered at Sawi for the funeral service. Our teachers sent us home so they could attend.

Instead of continuing on to Grade 2 at Kandep in 1966, I absconded to Mariant Catholic Mission School, which had been established by Fr. Theis. I was tempted to do so because it was close to my village, Kondo.

Yet I never really understood why I was attending school. I repeated Grade 1 at Mariant. Fr. Theis taught us for a while until an
Australian teacher, Mr Carmichael, took over the following year. His girlfriend whose name was Ann came to visit him later in the year. I remember she was a good graphic artist – she drew pictures for Mr Carmichael to use in class.

During art class, we sketched the picture of a man on the front cover of *Time* magazine. Much later, I learnt that he was John F Kennedy.

When Mr Carmichael left in 1968, we Grade 3 pupils were transferred to Kandep Primary ‘T’ School. I was back where I had started and had to again walk the long distance in the cold mornings and afternoon rain with barely any clothing at all except a green *laplap* issued to us as a school uniform.

Mariant Catholic Mission School remained open with the recruitment of new teachers. It prospered and continued to produce university graduates like Peter Mision Yaki, Philip Meck, Sakias Tamao and others.

Fr. Theis concentrated more on his pastoral work. One of the very few girls he taught was Agnes Alemambu Amben. She was in my class when I was at Mariant but when she developed a bone disease in one of her legs, Fr Theis sent her to Mt Hagen Hospital for treatment. While on medication, she stayed with the sisters at Rabiamul Catholic Mission and attended the primary school there.

She passed her grade 6 national examinations and attended Notre Dame Girls High School at Kumdi in the Western Highlands. She successfully completed grade 10 and trained as a community school teacher at Holy Trinity Teachers College. She was the first girl from Kandep to train as a teacher.

She married Malipu Tindiwi, also a teacher. All their five children - one girl and four boys - are working in the public and private sectors. Two are graduates from the University of Papua New Guinea and Divine Word University. Unfortunately, their eldest son, Martin, died in 2014 leaving behind a son.

Another girl, Jennifer Salimbu Mangao was one of three girls in my class at Kandep Primary School. In those days many parents never allowed their girls to attend school.

Jennifer passed her exams in 1971, together with seven of us boys and we all went to St Paul’s Lutheran High School at Pausa, Wapenamamnda. After grade 10, Simili Alonk enrolled at the University of PNG and graduated with a law degree becoming
Kandep’s first lawyer.

Simon Tamula Yanz is now a retired high school principal. Eric Ere Kombeakali also trained as a High School teacher but ended up working as Director of Planning at the University of Goroka before he prematurely retired after developing a stroke.

Philip Yangao Lopar trained as an agricultural officer and worked in the West Sepik province. He married a local lady who bore him some sons. When she died, he remarried into the community and continues to live in the West Sepik with his children. Elijah Erapa Yauk - the fellow who tried to jump off Fr. Theis’ moving jeep is a retired primary school headmaster.

And Jennifer Salimbu Mangao trained as a nursing sister at Taurama and became the first fully trained nursing sister from Kandep. She met her husband, Dr Timothy Pyakalia attending medical school. He was the first Engan to graduate as a medical doctor.

From Papayuku village in Laiagam Dr Timothy Pyakalia retired in 2013 as Deputy Secretary, Technical Health Services with the National Department of Health.

Jennifer continued to work at the Port Moresby General Hospital as the Nurse Unit Manager of Obstetrics and Gynaecology. They raised four children, three biological and one adopted.

Their first son, Dr Vincent Pyakalia, is a consultant physician and Deputy Director for Rural Curative Health Services at the Enga Provincial Hospital.

The second son Myron, is a Human Resource Consultant with Telikom PNG. Their daughter Jamila works as an Industrial Hygienist with Exxon Mobil. Adopted son, Larson pursued a career in Information Technology and did his final year at the Institute of Business Studies, Wabag Campus in 2015.

In 2006, Dr Vincent Pyakalia was one of the two doctors who saved Alois Hemetsberger’s life from an impending heart attack. Hemetsberger, originally from Austria in Europe, was a naturalized citizen who later became his father in law.

Dr Vincent Pyakalia married Emmanuella. Hemetsberger’s fourth born child in a family of eleven children of whom three are adopted. Emmanuella is a trained accountant from Central Queensland University in Brisbane and all her five brothers are engineers - some married with children.
Dr Vincent met Emmanuella when she brought one of her sisters, Angela, who got very sick with severe malaria when she was doing grade 10 at Sir Tei Secondary school.

Alois invited Dr Vincent to his house to thank him for helping Angela get well. Later when he fainted with a heart problem, Dr Vincent was invited to the house again to thank him for treating him. And then the relationship started and blossomed. Now they have two beautiful girls.

And Angela trained as a doctor at the University of Papua New Guinea’s Medical School at Taurama. Dr Angela Hemetsberger was completing her residency in 2015.

Alois Hemetsberger told his son in law, Dr Vincent, how he had suffered his first heart attack in 2002 after two of his children did not return in time after they went to play soccer at a tournament in Goroka.

“As a father of 11 children, I have always been happy with my children but not so much as now after I’ve suffered a heart condition.

“My first son James, a civil engineer is now working in Brisbane, Australia for a major railway company. He is married to an Australian with two beautiful girls.

“Marianne the second is working at Sap Ltd, Pawas, the third, Franz is an electrical engineer working at Lihir with Newcrest Mining Ltd, is married with three children.

“Emmy the forth worked as the Chief Financial Officer (CFO) at Highland Lutheran International School. She also had a stint with Millenium Guards in Port Moresby where she worked as their Administration Manager.

“Glenda, my first adapted daughter, is teaching at Wabag Primary School then there is Andrew who is a Mechanical Engineer working with Exxon Mobil.

“After Andrew there is Lazaro and Angela, a civil engineer and doctor respectively. After Angela we adapted Maryanne, who is a Medical Laboratory Technician.

“Sebastian is the tenth child and is doing his final year engineering at the University of Technology in Lae where all his elder brothers trained. We adopted yet another girl and she is the last of the family. This is Annabel, who is doing grade 10 at Sir Tei Secondary School.

“All my children have brought me delight in their own special ways but they really came through for me this year with my heart
I suffered my first heart attack in 2002 which occurred because of worry and tension. At this time Andrew and Lazaro had gone to Goroka for a soccer tournament. They had not returned on time. I worried so much that I collapsed on the front stairs of my house and was brought to hospital unconscious.

“I recovered from this, but after being seen by a doctor I was referred to Mount Hagen for some blood tests and a scan. These showed that the front part of my heart was not functioning well due to a shortage of blood supply caused by narrowed blood vessels; hence a heart attack was diagnosed.

“Since then I was generally well on Aspirin up until the beginning of 2006. I became bothered by heaviness of the chest and after seeing Dr. Vincent Pyakalyia, a doctor at Wabag Hospital, I had some tests done again.

“Along with my previous episode the doctors, who now included Dr. Richard Kulau were concerned as the tests showed that my heart wasn’t working too well and my body was showing warning signs of another heart attack.

“It was at this time that we talked about seeing a specialist in Port Moresby. This however, didn’t happen for about 3 months and during this time I began feeling worse.

“In Port Moresby the specialist recommended an angiogram. This is a special test in which a dye is injected into the blood stream and soon after a special picture is taken to show the blood flow around the heart. This test could not be performed here in Papua New Guinea.

“I came home with the task of organizing my trip to Brisbane, Australia for proper check-up and treatment. This took another two and a half months to organize and on the 27th of September 2006 I began my journey to Australia.

“My first consultation in Australia was with a Dr. Michael Adsett a Cardiologist on the 3rd of October. He suggested the angiogram be done as soon as possible. However, this was not possible until the 18th October due to limited finances. Both the angiogram and an angioplasty were done on this day, a procedure which took three hours. The full name of the procedure is *Coronary Balloon Angioplasty and Stint Insertion*.

“This describes the procedure by which the blocked vessels in my condition.
heart were reopened. I was awake the whole time with my hands folded behind my head. I watched the procedure on a small TV screen next to the bed.

“During the procedure a small incision was made in my right groin. This incision was no bigger than a button hole and the entire operation was performed through it. The camera and instrumentation, as I shall describe later, were all passed through this tiny button hole.

“A thin plastic catheter was inserted into the hole containing the camera, balloon and stint. Following a camera guided path along one of my major blood vessels, the tip of the catheter arrived at the affected vessel in my heart. It was mounted with a balloon that was inflated several times to compress the blockage. An expandable metal coil (stint) was implanted in the blockage to act like a scaffold in the blockage.

“After the procedure I spent one night in the ICU where I was checked continuously by nurses, and after four hours the catheter was removed and a pressure bandage was applied over the small wound.”

After that Alois came home to Wabag and has lived a normal life ever since.

Alois came to Enga province in 1966 as a Catholic Church missionary. However, in 1976 he resigned from the priesthood and married Franciscka, an Enga lass. Between them they have raised 11 Children (8 biological and 3 adopted) and live at Pawas near Wabag town.

Alois has had the good fortune to live a full life. He understood the essence of life and looked after his health well. And when he needed their help most, his children and other relatives paid for his medical bills and added more valuable years to his precious life.

Nowadays in Enga Province, a long line of cars of all descriptions travel in convoys with their horns and sirens blaring escorting bodies of loved ones home for burial as inquisitive by-standers whisper to each other to find out whose body it is that is being taken home for burial.

At the haus krai tons of food and drinks - cartoons of lamb flaps, Coke, cooking oil, bags of rice, cartoons of fish, noodles, sugarcane and bags of sweet potatoes are heaped up by friends and relatives.

Heaps of cash amounting to thousands of kina are also
contributed as a sign of their ‘last respects.’

It was customary to give in times of need but isn’t this exercise more time consuming and costly than the medical bill the deceased would have desperately needed to prolong his or her life at a well-equipped hospital?

Take a look at Alois Hemetsberger now at the ripe old age of 80, walking from Pawas village to Sangurap Catholic Mission every Sunday morning for church service.

But sometime soon he will embark on the trip that no man ever returns from. But he will have left behind a tribe of Hemetsbergers who will call Enga their home. And his good name will live on.

Like Alois Hemetsberger, a Kerema man named Fose Kake from Malalaua in the Gulf province came with an influx of people from other parts of PNG with gold prospectors, government patrols and missionaries.

Fose was a skilled carpenter. Others were policeman, carriers, cooks, interpreters, priests, brothers, catechists and tradesman. Like Alois Hemetsberger, Fose fell in love with a beautiful maiden from Niugu village in Laiagam and settled in the province permanently.

He worked with the Lagaip Local Government Council, the administration and the missions. He built many of the schools, aid posts, stores and churches still in use today in the province. Now, he lives in retirement in his second wife’s village at Faniufa Seventh Day Adventist Mission near Goroka in the Eastern Highlands.

Men like Alois, Fose and other pioneers contributed immensely to the development of the province. Their children continue to live in the province. The current member for Wabag, Robert Ganim is such an off-spring - the son of a Sepik policeman married to a local lady from Teremanda village.

And Minister for Environment and Conservation, John Pundari is of mixed parentage as well. While his father is of European origin, his mother is from Kompiam.

On 17 April, 2011, Provincial Administrator, Dr Samson Amean, invited Fose Kake to come to Wabag to speak to people on the need to live in peace like in the good old days when the missionaries and *kiaps* were in control of Enga Province.

Each year on this day, all government activity comes to a standstill when people attend special church services throughout the province. Fose Kake told the congregation in Wabag to change their attitudes,
embrace the Word of God, respect government and church properties, respect one another and learn to live in harmony.

Mr Kake told people to respect the law, honour God and seek His blessing. He said today’s generation of leaders and people should stop playing too much politics and the people should stop fighting over minor issues but bend down, get on their hands and knees and work.

Young people, he said, should not consume too much home brew, marijuana and beer and engage in illegal activities that will jeopardize their future.

He added that when he was working in Enga as a carpenter the area was a peaceful place and it should still be the same because it is still a beautiful place to live.

“Yes, those were the most peaceful days Enga ever experienced and there was peace, calm and harmony among all tribesmen everywhere,” Mr Kake said. “I am sure law and order will prevail with God’s help.”

From the 1960s to the 1980s there was absolute peace in Enga. The colonial administration was tough and effective. People who were caught breaking the law were caught and punished.

These tough measures brought fear and awe into the minds and hearts of the people and they generally behaved well and began to respect the government and followed the laws. Government service delivery improved and people began to adapt to the new changes and enjoyed life.

The colonial *kiaps* worked well with leaders like Sir Tei Abal and Tapus Kurai of Wabag, Karapen of Ambum Valley, Puio of Laiagam, Yopond Kepa of Wapenamanda, Neapukali Kemben of Kompiam, Liu Omapu and Nenk Pasul of Kandep and many others who ensured people followed instructions from the government.

Mr Kake had many friends in Wabag, including the late Sir Tei Abal and the late Peter Amean MBE, who were both *doktabois* (aid post orderlies) at the bush material *haus sik* in Wabag.

“I am impressed that the sons of people I knew very well are now the leaders of this province holding important government positions,” Mr Kake said.

He was referring to Grand Chief, Sir Peter Ipatas, whose father was a veteran government driver, Sam Abal, whose father Sir Tei was the first man from the Wabag district to enter the House of
Assembly, Dr Samson Amean, whose father was a doktaboi and who later became Deputy Premier in the first elected Enga Provincial Government. The first Premier was Danely Tindiwi, whose father was a policeman from Karekare village in Kandep.

Mr Kake fathered three boys and two girls with his first wife from Niugu village. One of them is Dr Seth Fose Kake, who works at Port Moresby General Hospital.

He left Enga in 1970 to work in Mt Hagen and, later, Goroka. “I enjoyed my stay here. Today there is fighting but I believe Enga can change. The people should realise they live in a changing world which we are all part of. They must not act like a blind man.”

Kake is over 80 years of age now and considers himself a Highlander. He went back to Malalaua in Kerema only twice - and then no more. He has no land in Malalaua, not even a single betel nut tree. He would end his life in the cool Highlands.

“My heart is still with Enga,” he said, maybe because he found his first love here.

Before he departed for his second wife’s village in Goroka, Kake showed me some old pictures taken in the good old days.

Dr Samson Amean was in one of the photos as a small boy standing beside his father, late Peter Amean MBE. Another picture showed him putting on late Sir Tei Abal’s necktie. That story is next.
Sir Tei Abal a Founding Father of the Nation &
the Aftermath of Independence

The late Sir Tei Abal transcended being cast out as an orphan to rise to the top echelons of power in Papua New Guinea.

He is remembered as a charismatic nationalist whose magnetism was able to unite PNG on the path to democracy.

He gave up his chance to be Prime Minister in 1975 to quell strong undercurrents of secessionist sentiment from the Papuan and New Guinea Islands region so PNG could emerge as a united country.

While he rejected independence as coming too early for a young country where rural people still lived much as their ancestors had done, he nonetheless contributed to the successful emergence of a new nation.

As the wheel of history turned, 18 years after Sir Tei’s death, his son Sam Abal was hand-picked by Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare to stand in as Prime Minister before Somare left for prolonged medical treatment in Singapore.

Tei Abal was born sometime between 1929 and 1931 to Abal Monape and a wife who is unknown. She is believed to have succumbed to starvation as a result of a devastating frost that left the Laiagam valley barren of crops. Abal Monope was a Temaga tribesman from Mapumanda village in Laiagam. Tei Abal was raised in the same village until he was about seven years old when the famine struck. In search of food, father and son later fled Laiagam through the Lakale trade route into the Lai Valley of Wabag.

But as they tried to settle in Wabag, Piao tribesmen murdered Abal Monope near where the present day Sir Tei Abal Secondary
School stands. Yakale tribesmen collected his body and buried him in their village of Keas. But young Tei was left to fend for himself.

He soon realised it was dangerous to live in Wabag because survival meant stealing and he would certainly be killed if he was caught. Fear drove the young boy, by now aged about 10, east to Wapenamanda. He eventually settled in the rich Tsak Valley among generous tribesmen who looked after him and groomed him into a smart young man.

By this time, missionaries and government patrols were infiltrating Enga and a man named Timone, from Irelya in Wabag, who worked as an interpreter, observed that Tei had an alert and inquisitive mind. Timone brought Tei to Wabag Patrol Post.

On 12 July 1947 Tei Abal was recruited as an orderly at the newly established Wabag aid post. He learned fast and showed a natural ability to lead, swiftly attaining supervisory roles.

In the course of his duties, he carried out one of the biggest immunisation programs ever undertaken in Enga. He walked for months through rough terrain and along dangerous trails to reach every corner of the district.

In 1954, Tei married Nael (now Lady Abal), the daughter of a tribal leader from Pawas village. When Lady Nael’s father was killed in battle, Tei assumed leadership responsibilities and quickly established himself among the Kaialu clan of the Awain tribe near Wabag town.

Soon his influence reached all parts of Enga. The first national elections in 1964 saw him elected to the new House of Assembly. He worked tirelessly to establish aid posts, schools, roads and bridges throughout Enga.

In 1968, the Wabag Local Government Council resolved to return Tei Abal unopposed to the second House of Assembly - it happened and Tei made history in PNG politics as the first person to be elected unopposed after a mere council resolution.

Tei now began to figure prominently in national politics. He was appointed Under-Secretary for Labour and served on various committees appointed by the Australian colonial administration. Administrator David Hay in particular had high regard for this illiterate leader from Wabag.

Tei Abal was appointed to the Constitutional Planning Committee, which was tasked with writing the national constitution.
or *Mama Loa*. It was at about this time that he co-founded the Compass Party, which later changed its name to United Party and was chosen as its first leader. Now the entire Highlands region looked up to him as their leader.

The third general elections in 1972 saw Tei winning in a landslide. PNG now acquired self-government and he was appointed Minister for Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries. He knew that the majority of the people, particularly his Highlands people, were not ready for early independence. The Highlands were still underdeveloped and the distribution of wealth and jobs throughout PNG was unequal.

Between 1972 and 1975 there was a rush towards independence. Tei Abal fought hard to unite PNG while opposing early independence. He came to St Paul’s Lutheran High School in Enga when I was there in 1973 and told staff and students that PNG had to experience self-government for a while before going it alone.

At the time, he said Michael Somare’s Pangu Party was trying to accomplish the impossible. He graphically compared it as someone trying to chew sugarcane and sweet potato at the same time. “*Wanpela man ino inap kaikai kaukau waintaim suka.*”

Under the United Party’s slogan ‘United We Stand, Divided We Fall’, Tei made sure his party was accepted not only by his Highlands people but throughout PNG. Party membership swelled and it became the biggest single party.

His push to hold back independence failed but Tei Abal seemed destined to become the first Prime Minister. But when independence came in 1975, to the disappointment of his party members, Sir Tei offered the Prime Ministership to John Guise for the sake of national unity.

As it turned out, Guise didn’t get the job. Michael Somare formed a coalition government and became the first Prime Minister. The United Party remnants moved into opposition and Mathias Toliman became their leader. Tei Abal was awarded the CBE.

Upon the sudden death of Mr Toliman in 1976, Tei took over the opposition leadership and, in the same year, he was knighted. Now Sir Tei, he moved to establish Enga as a separate province and declared Wabag as its headquarters.

Sir Tei’s years of hard work took its toll. In 1979 he suffered his first stroke whilst attending a Cabinet meeting in Madang. He was rushed to Goroka Base Hospital and survived. But his health
continued to fail. In 1980, he suffered a second stroke, which left the right side of his body paralysed.

Despite his ill health, he remained Minister for Public Utilities and Leader of the United Party. But his health continued to deteriorate, he could not speak well and he became frail. The once great orator was reduced to a shell.

Despite that, he again nominated for the 1982 national elections. This time he lost.

His condition continued to worsen but his tough Highlands body kept him alive. By 1991, Sir Tei was completely immobilised and doctors explained to him there was nothing more they could do.

In October 1993, Sir Tei was brought home to Keas village to be looked after by his family, relatives and friends. At 5pm on 14 March 1994 - after such a long struggle - he breathed his last.

The pioneer politician who had spent the better part of his life fighting for national unity had died. He left behind his wife, three sons and two daughters.

The state funeral was attended by thousands of people who stood around the freshly dug grave and watched the pioneer politician laid to rest just a couple of meters away from his late father, Abal Monape.

I personally was exposed to outside contact for only 17 years, from the time the first census patrol came to my village in 1958 to the time when PNG gained independence in 1975.

Many of the younger generation don’t know how fluid the situation was and confused the people were at the time. It was also an emotional period when Australia granted us self-rule - freedom which many other countries have struggled and shed blood to achieve.

I feel privileged to have witnessed everything that happened in Port Moresby on 15 and 16 September 1975. As I reflect, it seems as if it was only yesterday that Prince Charles, on behalf of Queen Elizabeth II, flew all the way from England to officially open the Independence celebrations at the Sir Hubert Murray Stadium.

I can remember the Ela Beach Hotel being renovated to accommodate Prince Charles, the royal entourage and the many other important dignitaries who came to celebrate with us.

I was a Grade 10 student at Idubada Technical College. The whole student body marched to the Sir Hubert Murray Stadium to witness the ceremony. I remember the Australian flag being officially lowered
for the last time in the afternoon and carefully folded.

A single soldier took it to Governor-General Sir John Guise who handed it to his Australian counterpart, Sir John Kerr.

There was no television in PNG then, no internet, no mobile phones and not many newspapers. Radio played a significant role and the whole country was glued to it for news and live coverage of events. I joined a group of students around a radio set on the stroke of midnight to hear Sir John Guise announce to the world that a new country was born.

As 16 September dawned into a full bright day, the new PNG flag was raised for the first time by a young student from the Sacred Heart School on Yule Island, Susan Karike, who had designed it. Now Mrs Huhume, Susan had won a nationwide design competition back in 1971.

It was a very passionate moment and people wept openly. But I was rather young and too ignorant to understand the significance of the occasion and did not pay full attention to everything that was said by Prince Charles, Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam and PNG Chief Minister Michael Somare.

My attention was soon focused on the 100-gun salute and the army, navy, police and correctional services accompanied by the police and army bands and *singsing* groups. Everything was new to me, having come from Kandep, a remote patrol post of the then Western Highlands District.

The biggest aeroplane I had ever flown in brought me to Port Moresby for the first time and it was the experience of a lifetime - a DC3 aircraft operated by Air Niugini, the national airline established in November, 1973.

In the afternoon I walked to the residence of Kandep’s first MP, Nenk Pasul MBE, on Touaguba Hill. The member had invited all the people from his electorate living in Port Moresby to celebrate independence with him.

He arranged his guests - mainly rubber plantation labourers, casual employees and vagrants - according to their tribal groups and distributed food and cartons of beer to them.

There were only five people in our Aimbarep tribal group including Nenk Pasul himself. I opened the stubbies and served drinks. After a while, Nenk Pasul looked at me strongly and asked me to help finish the beer because there was so much.
When I protested, reminding him that I was only a student, he said, “I know, I know. You are going to school and to work someday. But what will you do with all the money you get? You will surely spend some of it on beer. So, accept my offer now and experience how it tastes on this very important occasion. Try it.”

Then he opened a stubby and handed it to me, his unblinking, glaring eyes penetrating deep into my own. I was confused but yet it was hard to resist this offer from our big man. So, I took the plunge, drank two or three stubbies and passed out. I don’t know what happened next but woke up the next day on a bed in Mr Pasul’s house.

In September, 2014 during the 39th Independence Day celebrations, I shared these experiences with some of my children and relatives on the top of Mt Kondo, overlooking my village of the same name in Kandep.

The youngest of my relatives was Dominica Roa, a two-year old girl carried to the top by her uncles and aunties. She would otherwise be in Kimbe, West New Britain, but because her parents work in Wabag she travelled to Kondo with her mother, Jacinta to climb the mountain with me on Independence Day.

I was glad to have her on the mountain because, as a youth, I used to frequent this mountain with my peers to roast sweet potatoes and corn over open fires.

This stopped when I started attending school. Now, after about fifty years, I was back on the mountain frying sausages for 30 odd people, mostly children.

It felt good to be on my mountain again - feeling the cold wind tug at my clothes and seeing the beautiful sights of Kandep in every direction. In the distance I could see the Lai and Mariant Rivers uniting as one near my village before the stream meandered its way to Mendi and beyond to finally empty into the Gulf of Papua.

I could see Kombolos village to the north where the late Nenk Pasul was born. He lies buried in a cement vault in Kandep, near the spot where the first Australian colonial administration office stood.

Beside him lies Talu Yapakain from Lawe village, who was the tanim tok (interpreter) for the kiaps Jim Fenton, Ross Allan, Lloyd Warr and others. Pilai Lero, the other tanim tok from Kandep who helped the kiaps is buried about two kilometres away at Mugaip village on his block of land. And Liu OMAPU from the Wage census
division is also buried near him.

Except for Nenk Pasul, who was awarded an MBE by Queen Elizabeth II during her Birthday Honours Awards some years ago, these men were never recognised by the PNG government or the Australian government for their efforts.

Pasul had been serving the colonial administration as Luluai, Councillor, first Kandep Local Government Council President, and first Member of Parliament representing Kandep, Enga Provincial Government Member for Mariant Constituency and Provincial Minister in various portfolios until he died.

Former kiaps like Jim Fenton and Lloyd Warr had to approach the Australian Government on their own initiative for some form of recognition for the work they did during the colonial times in PNG.

After long protracted lobbying the Australian Government decided to award them with the Police Overseas Service Medal. Jim received his medal only in 2014.

This award was deemed appropriate as at the time of their service they were all appointed Commissioned Officers of the RPNGC Field Constabulary because at Patrol Posts and Sub-Districts they were in charge of the armed police detachments. Although they did not wear uniforms they still had police powers.

Since then the PNG government has recognized him with another two honours - the Royal Papua New Guinea Constabulary Centenary Medal and RPNGC Loyal Service and Good Conduct Medal.

“Together with the Independence Medal given to me in 1976 when I left the service, I now have four. They will all go to my grandson when I fall off my perch,” said Jim Fenton, 81.

Many leaders I saw at the first independence celebrations have also died including Sir John Guise, Sir Tei Abal, Sir Iambakey Okuk, Sir Paul Lapun and others. Gough Whitlam, whose government granted PNG its independence died too as well as Sir John Kerr and Malcolm Fraser.

Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare and Sir Julius Chan are the last two men standing. They have both been Prime Ministers and are still active members of Parliament. Queen Elizabeth II is still PNG’s head of state and continues to reign over in England as Prince Charles awaits his turn.

As I descended Mt Kondo late that afternoon, with all the people following me, I wondered why Nenk Pasul, MBE had offered me
that stubby knowing full well that I was only an inexperienced young student.

As a relative, he certainly did not intend to spoil me, so did he test me to see if I had the guts to resist temptation when I grew up and be a good responsible citizen of this country and look after the welfare of those who would be dependent on me?

I can answer my own question on Mt Kondo every time I climb it on 16 September to celebrate independence with my children and grandchildren.

But I began to worry for the future of my children, my Enga Province and my country starting in the 1980s.

There was a widespread breakdown in law and order. Tribal warfare, armed robbery, rape and other social problems reached high levels as government services deteriorated. Intense politics and deep-rooted corruption took centre stage.

The culmination in Enga Province was the wholesale destruction of the provincial administration complex - a K3 million modern building gutted in an arson attack on 23 March 1993.

I stood helplessly and watched it burn to a smouldering ruin within four hours. I saw police station commander Willie Ambrose with a handful of his men try desperately to put out the flames.

And I heard a lone leader from the Lankep tribe, one of five original clans that owned the land on which Wabag town sits, shout repeatedly to nobody in particular: “Why are you burning the office which belongs to everybody in Enga Province?”

Inspector Ambrose and his men struggled to break through a deadlocked door to fight the fire. Others tried to put out the flames through the window with very old and very useless fire extinguishers. There was no town water supply.

It was heart wrenching to see brave people who had poured in from nearby villages try to put the flames out while others rubbed themselves in mud, cried and walked around the inferno as at a funeral.

Some heartless people looted. "I don't see any reason that prompts these people to loot government property. Don’t they realise that with those flames goes Enga Province?" a policeman from Eastern Highlands asked.

"People don't seem to realise what long term implications this destruction has for Enga - the province is burning in that fire."
Earlier that Friday afternoon, I had locked my office and gone for a drive in my fifteen seater bus. The office ten-seater had gone to Mt Hagen with most of the staff members. Half an hour later, somebody at the market told me the Bromley and Manton supermarket was on fire.

I hoped that Bromley and Manton did not burn down a second time. In 1989 the company had lost goods worth thousands of kina when arsonists torched the building after Malipu Balakau was shot dead by rascals in Mt Hagen.

But to my absolute horror, the main provincial headquarters was burning. My own media office was housed in a separate robust wooden structure built in the 1960s by kiaps during the colonial period. I hastily ran in and grabbed whatever I could - my word processor, typewriter and a few files. A horde of looters took the rest but the building was saved.

The wanton destruction was the culmination of a period of political upheaval. First Communications Minister Malipu Balakau was killed in Mt Hagen. Then the Enga Provincial Government was suspended for a second time under premier Danely Tindiwi.

There were then various senior appointments made and fought against and finally the office complex was torched. The combined efforts of police from Enga, Mt Hagen and Port Moresby failed to catch the culprits.

Then followed much tension and confusion in the province. People from Porgera, Laiagam, Kandep and Maramuni threatened to break away to form their own province of West Enga. People from the east wanted the headquarters to be relocated from Wabag to Wapenamanda.

The destruction of the headquarters was seen as an act of terror perpetrated against the state and the people themselves. The wanton destruction rocked the foundations of established Enga society.

The ruins of the handsome building spewed smoke for days. The public service machinery was rendered useless. I came across a public servant who said: "I hate to be an Engan. Everything about this place is always negative...negative. I hate to have been born here."

Grieving with the people of Enga was Wabag Local Government Council president Peter Ipatas. He was a mere spectator. Council presidents had no power in those days.
Ten years later Ipatas was to replace Enga's lost pride with a state of the art, three-story office complex with two wings and a helipad. It cost over K21 million. Having won the 1997 national elections as Governor of the province, Ipatas was able to secure government funding to construct the new headquarters.

Friday, 28 November 2003 was a proud moment for me when it was officially opened because I had seen and felt the heat of the destructive flames that had consumed the former building before my eyes.

“Good kumu can grow from the ashes of a fire,” elders told me in the hausman. They added that it took real guts for people in the community to brush aside problems, think positively and provide the best for their families and their tribesmen.

So Governor Ipatas replaced the old gutted building, christened it the ‘Ipatas Centre’, formulated the free education policy and encouraged people to start lodges and hotels to tap into the lucrative tourism industry.

“Education will open your eyes. You will eat rice every day of your life if you send your children to school,” Ipatas told people wherever he went. “Porgera gold mine will cease to operate one day. It is through other people coming to Enga that money will be generated. Look after the visitors and tourists coming to our province well. They will bring in the money.”

These days, many Engans hold important positions throughout PNG in both the government and the private sector. And tourism activity has grown remarkably. Wabag town alone has over 10 motels and guest houses.

Despite continuing law and order problems and political antagonism, Enga has been able to enjoy stability and noticeable achievements in the last 20 years. PNG will grow to new heights only if political leaders and top bureaucrats follow Ipatas’ example and cooperated with each other.

Queen Elizabeth II even recognised his work. During the 2015 birthday honours awards list, Her Majesty bestowed on Governor Peter Ipatas the Order of the British Empire - KBE for services to the community in the fields of health education and vocational training.
In 1989, I had the good fortune to travel to England and saw how the queen is revered there. I saw how Stone Age communities had evolved to Bronze Age communities then to Iron Age to tribal kingdoms and to the modern state – the United Kingdom.

I saw how the people took great pride and cared for their historical sites - ancient ruins, old Roman roads, public libraries, colleges, museums, castles, and cathedrals, statues of their leaders, their Parliament buildings and government offices.

As a school boy I was taught to sing the national anthem at the time, ‘God Save the Queen’, every morning at Kandep Primary ‘T’ School. It never occurred to me that one day I would see the dwelling places of the British Monarch – Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

I even saw Queen Elizabeth II herself in person from across the street when she visited a London hospital.
In the United Kingdom

“Mankind has learnt to do many things but it cannot recreate extinct species,” His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, Buckingham Palace, 1989
Our Grand Adventure Was to Fly Over Those Mountains and Beyond

My dream of soaring into the blue skies of Kandep in the belly of an aeroplane began with the recruitment of young men straight from the village to work on rubber, copra and cocoa plantations on the coast.

How I wished to look down upon the two great swamplands of Kandep with their many lakes and rivers teeming with wildlife, then disappear over the mountains to distant places.

I am sure, had I been old enough, I would have allowed myself to be recruited under the indentured labour scheme that operated during the colonial period.

My Uncle Wariak Mainu, Pambuti Nawe, Bui Waion and Toank Londokai - all young men from my village - were loaded on that big plane with three propellers, two on the wings and one on the nose.

I stood at the top end of the airstrip at Kandep and watched the plane rumble down the runway scattering the ducks, cormorants, white cranes and other swamp birds that took to the air in panic.

With a mighty roar, it lifted off the ground and headed towards Tari, banked south and, as it gained height, turned north to disappear over the sloping hills of Yaik Kungu.

Then there was quietness and the birds of the swamp settled down to feed again on the lakes.

Two years later Uncle Wariak returned and gave my father a knapsack, which everybody affectionately referred to as a ‘barasapen nun’. My father hugged Wariak for the gift, treated it with care and used it for many years.
My uncle mentioned that he had worked in a place called Madang where coconuts grew everywhere. He said he had to cut grass, crack open coconuts and dry the white flesh. This was put in bags and shipped to faraway places over a huge body of water called solwara.

Uncle Wariak must have liked plantation work because later he said goodbye again. He left me wondering where he was this time. The answer came in 1974 when he sent a $2 note in an envelope with a letter from Wakunai in Bougainville.

By then I was in Grade 9 at Lae Technical College, far away from my wantoks. I was happy to receive the money from my uncle. Two dollars was a lot of money then.

Young men from all over the Highlands were recruited under the indentured labour scheme. Some went to Port Moresby to work on the rubber plantations while others were taken to Madang, Rabaul and Bougainville to work on copra and cocoa plantations.

Arthur Williams who now lives in Cardiff, Wales managed some of the plantations and was familiar with conditions on Bougainville. He was also married to a girl from New Ireland and describes life as lived by the contract workers. He takes up the story.

‘Possibly in 1972 I was sitting with other kiaps in Taskul one day when we heard on the radio that the government was going to introduce cash wages in lieu of the wages-in-kind that was part of the contracts till then.

With us was Jim White a long term Pommie planter, trader and ship owner who, when I first met him, thought he was an Ozzie because having been up in Wau pre-WW2, then fought with Australian Infantry in North Africa moved to ANGAU as the Japanese war ended and got a clutch of plantations on Lavongai Island - so that by my time he sounded like a dinky-di Australian, certainly not a Pommie.

Anyway Jim almost spilt his cold-one as he exploded, “That's the bloody end of me then!” Or words to that effect.

He later explained to me that fortnightly, under the now soon to end scheme, he would pay his 'contracts' with some basic items such as soap, rice, tin fish, lip ti but especially black sticks of 'Muruk' tobacco, plus an occasional tee-shirt and some 'Rami' - laplap as we of the New Guinea side called the forty odd inches of cheap Hong Kong material that nearly everyone was then wearing round their waists.
I think there was a tiny cash payment to purchase odd and ends from the plantation's own store. Gradually Jim and his fellow planters saw their lines of indentured labourers *pinis-taim* and depart the islands for the long trip home - three ocean trips for them as most were not flown home.

For the Tari and Kopiago, it would then mean a long dusty bumpy ride up the Highway. Many of these mostly young men proudly carried their small red wooden box in which were the material rewards for their two years or longer contracts.

Each also had an official copy of a government form that entitled them to collect a small cash reward from their home area's district cash office. This small cash payment was a legal requirement for each employer to provide under the scheme.

Of course many young men, couldn't resist the beauty of the island girls and so decided not to go home at *pinis-taim* but pay a tiny bride-price to marry and raise families.

By the seventies there was a scattering of 'redskins', as the darker islanders called these Highlanders or Sepiks, throughout Lavongai with children who would never see their father's home area.

Particularly as the island follows a matrilineal land inheritance system so the clan affiliations of the father were of almost non-importance. So it didn't matter that I was an outsider when I too married locally.

Jim didn't like the cash wages idea because it meant he would have to now increase the percentage of locally hired workers, “And that's not the best Arthur,” he explained.

“It means that I never know who will turn up for work because someone will always have a funeral, bride-price or other customary duty to perform rather than work. Hell, I've had workers who have apparently buried their grand-dad three times over the years! My old contracts never gave me that problem.”

From that momentous change in plantation wage regime Jim would never bother to do extra horticultural jobs on his numerous plantations.

Some seven years later I temporarily worked one of his smaller ones and found his once very fruitful cocoa trees had been unpruned for a very long time.

I personally pruned many of them to the delight of the next itinerant manager who benefitted from my hard work that had
provided him with bumper flushes of ripe pods.

The waste of time pruning idea was obliviously also shared by a couple of ex-contracts who had married locally and were squatting inside the boundary of the plantation. They had harvested over the years from the sometimes decaying overgrown trees.

I recall having brief arguments with one who claimed the cocoa beans he wanted to sell me were from his own trees that he had planted in anticipation of Masta White never coming to inspect the place.

My antagonist told me one of the reasons for his squatting was to be near to the *matmat* where a couple of his *wantoks* had died while working for Jim.

While managing the Catholic Mission's three south coast copra/cocoa plantations on Lavongai I had a few *pinis-taim* workers who had married locally too.

The last of the batch was a Menyamya convicted sorcerer.... “I was only getting the jawbone from his body in the new grave to make some magicc" he once told me.

He was proud owner of the #1 mark on his five daily sacks. He was a fantastic worker - every day he would provide 5 x 100lbs shelled or Ceylon copra, we didn't use the finger cutting method.

Towards dusk I would see him set off with his bags for the block he would work in tomorrow. Soon you would see anti-mosquito smoke arising from burning coconut fronds near the spots where he was loading his dry-nuts into heaps.

He never made use of the plantation's store *dinau* book which many of my workers used to exist for the last few days of the second week of a fortnight when their meagre wages dwindled.

I was a help to him in several ways sometime later when he decided to woo and win a no longer young woman from inland Lavongai. Even took a few Polaroid pictures of the pig and traditional money he used to buy the lady and especially of the small block just off the plantation land that he had paid for traditionally.

One of these photos would come in handy some years later when another *pinis-taim*, *wantok*, married locally too, wanted to claim the land after my old worker had died.

Another character known on my roll books as Peter-Sepik was a very strong, tall labourer - no prizes for guessing his expat given name.
One memorable afternoon he came to the store at the end of the day asking for an aspirin. When I enquired if he had fever he replied, “Nogat boss, wapela drai emi pandann long bet bilon mi!” I was amazed as he had apparently continued for several hours after the nut had fallen from a tall maturing palm ... enough to kill you.

But Peter's very strong bald head - in the village he was known as Peter-Kela (Peter the bald) - had luckily protected him safely. He suffered no other effects from what could have been a fateful meeting with death.

One week the Bishop had sent a tok-savi for anyone interested to work at his distant Rakunda Plantation in the Duke of Yorks, any volunteers must assemble on the beach in Metekavil.

On Sunday morning MV Margaret anchored in our bay and several men said farewell to their wives etc. I noticed a commotion as Peter's lame wife cried in sorrow at seeing her breadwinner wanting to get in the dinghy to be taken out to the ship. He eventually managed to loosen his distraught wife's hold on his arm and left her behind.

Much to the villager's amusement she wouldn't stop wailing as the ship started moving out of sight and cried a plaintive “Peter!” many times as she walked along the bush track paralleling its eastwards voyage.

Her pleas were answered as apparently the vessel was late in reaching Kavieng and the recruits from elsewhere had already departed on a Rabaul bound ship. With great relief her Peter-Kela came home to her and re-joined my workers the next fortnight.'

And so when it was ‘pinis taim’ for Uncle Wariak, he finally returned to Kandep with others on a plane from Mt Hagen. I remember people milling around them at the airstrip to see how some of them chewed buai.

They were curious to see how their teeth had become black after chewing the red mixture daily for many months on the coast. People commented that they had become like coastal people.

They did not continue the habit because chewing and selling buai was not popular in Kandep in those days.

Other young men never returned home when their two year contract expired. The explanation was that they had consumed some sort of poison or a masalai (evil spirit) had entered their minds to
make them forget relatives and their homeland. Their spouses would often remarry.

On 16 September 1975, I met some of these lost young men at Nenk Pasul’s residence in Port Moresby when we celebrated independence with a big *mumu* feast and drinks. These men had abandoned their jobs on rubber plantations and migrated to the city in search of better paid jobs like cooks, security guards and shop assistants.

Many lived like kings compared to plantation conditions. They had free accommodation with plumbing, electric light, health facilities and other amenities. They were earning good wages.

To supplement their income, they sold *buai*, collected bottles and even sold black market alcohol. Some wasted their pay at the liquor shop or found sex in the ‘K2 bush’ in what is now the Waigani and Gordons industrial areas or the seafront behind Paga Hill.

One former plantation labourer was greatly envied. He had joined a major shipping line as a cook and travelled to the Pacific, Australia, Asia and the Americas. This was Andrew Kusit from Konari village. His friends wanted most to hear about Kusit’s exploits with foreign women.

“Once when the ship anchored at Sydney Harbour,” he began. “I went into a bar at King’s Cross and ordered drinks. It wasn’t long before a beautiful *misis* with red lips came and sat on a stool next to me.

“I offered her a drink and she accepted it. I knew she meant business so I offered her another one and some more until she agreed to come with me to a lodge.”

“How did you converse with this lady?” asked Toank Londokai.

“What does it matter to speak with someone who only wants to drink your money?” replied Andrew Kusit. “You can speak to her any way you wish - broken English, sign language, Pidgin, whatever. Important thing is to supply her with enough drink. That’s what she is after.”

He said, of all the women he came across, the most beautiful were those from the Pacific islands.

“They are really beautiful like the legendary *Tapuenda Ipali* from the sky. When you look at Pacific island girls, they are like the sun in your eyes,” he told the silent crowd of men.

The ship’s cook knew how to manipulate these poor sex-starved
buggers, most in their thirties and still single. They had come on arranged flights over the mountains - they didn’t know how to go back on their own. Some didn’t even know in which direction home was.

They had no clue how to go back, get married, bring the wife to the city and raise a family. It was even harder for them to approach the Motuan, Koari and Kerema women in Port Moresby let alone single female office workers.

One of my cousins, Raphael Apin, was smarter than the rest. He saved money, went home, paid bride price for a village lass and brought her to the city. They lived at Goldie River Army Training Depot where he was a chef. He sent his children to school and his first son Mark is now a senior medical doctor in Port Moresby.

And Andrew Kusit brought home a beautiful lady from Malaita in the Solomon Islands. He met her in Honiara on one of his sea voyages. She was a kind and humble woman who never complained about serving a plate of food to people who went to her house at Morata Two.

This initial marriage into Malaitan culture paved the way for Sakias Tamao, Paul Steward Itiogon and David Kaiao to marry three of Andrew’s tambus.

Now, Kambrip tribesmen from Kandep have land at Malaita and regard it as their second home, which of course is the Melanesian way.

The time for me to fly overseas on an Air Niugini Airbus was just around the corner.

On a fine sunny day in March 1989, I found myself anxiously waiting at the Jacksons International Airport in Port Moresby to fly to Hong Kong and on to England. Fr Paul Roche whom I had just met and later flew with me on the same flight to Hong Kong and a couple of wantoks kept me company.

Only minutes from departure, I met my long-time friend John Eggins, news director of EMTV. He remarked: “Daniel I like the way you are dressed for travel.”

Those relatively simple sentiments were to linger in my mind. What he was talking about was my long beard, my hand woven Highlands cap and the bilum or string bag I was carrying which contained my tickets, passport, camera and small change.
I felt proud to travel like that - a typical Papua New Guinean and a highlander at that. There were more than two million Africans, Caribbeans and Asians living in Great Britain and if it wasn’t for the way I was attired, I could have passed for just another black man.

I would never have met the people that I did. I will relate these meetings later on. But first share a moment with me in front of the PNG High Commission office in London.

For a few moments I stood smiling, admiring the flag with the Bird of Paradise fluttering in the wind. I was alone. I could turn to no one to express how I felt - to say to them that the flag flying up there was mine.

The hundreds of people who endlessly crowd the streets of London went their way unaware of the feelings I had for my country.

But I am getting the cart before the horse. I didn’t just find the flag or the High Commission as easily as it sounds. After arriving from Cardiff, I rang the office and made an appointment.

I could visit them anytime and directions were given. “First get on the train to Piccadilly Circus and we are five minutes-walk away at Waterloo Place.,” the girl said.

Fantastic, that would be easy I thought and looked forward to meeting the High Commissioner and other Papua New Guineans.

But as I emerged from the underground tube station at Piccadilly Circus, I realized I was in the middle of nowhere. I was caught up in a lot of activity feeling lost. This was the first time I was out by myself on the second day of being in London - one of the world’s biggest cities.

I should have come with the Sri Lankan girl who wanted to accompany me, I blamed myself. She had been in London before and had lived there for a year. London’s Piccadilly Circus looked intimidating.

Lights were flashing, cars and coaches hooted as music blasted away in the shops. The murmur of thousands of voices and the tap, tap, tap of feet on the pavement drowned out my thoughts.

First I walked up one street, then another trying to find a notice that would read “Waterloo Place”. After about twenty minutes of searching, I decided to ring the High Commission office.

Instead I approached an elderly taxi driver and asked for help. I said to him I wished to hire his taxi to Waterloo Place.
“I wouldn’t do that if I were you. It is so near, I will show you the directions,” he said kindly.

He gave me precise directions and I indeed arrived at Waterloo Place. But again I searched for the PNG office. I stumbled into a shop that was selling New Zealand products, calmed myself down for a couple of minutes and walked out again.

On the street, I disturbed three pigeons which flew away to roost on a statue called the ‘Crimea’ in the middle of the road. As my eyes followed the birds, I saw something familiar on top of a handsome building. It was my flag. I realized I had been searching on the wrong side of the street.

“Why hadn’t I looked up?” I had been told the office was on the third floor. I hurried across and literally ran up the steps to the third floor. I met Julie Ono who was all smiles.

She wanted to know how home was. I told her I didn’t know what had happened in the last three weeks I was in the UK. But when I left, the PNG government and the Bougainville militants had agreed to a ceasefire.

After making courtesy calls on the High Commissioner, Philip Bouraga. I walked back to Piccadilly Circus to catch my train to Central London Polytechnic, where we were staying for a couple of days.

In the train. I wondered how Nathan Kigloma and Henry Kore, two Air Niugini aircraft engineers were managing over in Frankfurt, West Germany. We all left Port Moresby together on the same flight and met each other in Hong Kong.

I recalled how we had stood in the transit lodge of Hong Kong International Airport, one of the busiest in the world. We had spotted the lone Air Niugini Airbus among the many much bigger airlines of the world.

“See how small and lonely it is among those jumbo jets,” I said.

“Yes, the only thing PNG has around here,” Henry Kore remarked. “When the airbus is gone, we will be all alone.”

“But I will be the loneliest of the three of us,” I said. “You two will depend on each other but for me I don’t know.”

At 10:30pm, the announcement came over the loudspeaker system for passengers travelling to London’s Gatwick Airport to board through Gate 14.
I went through the gate, then turned briefly to wave Henry and Nathan goodbye. They wished me luck and I was on my own.

In the huge British Airways Boeing 747, I thought of Henry and Nathan and of relatives and friends back home. Soon I was in the air flying further and further away from PNG.

Sometime later in the night we landed at Dubai capital of United Arab Emirates for fuel. The hostess asked us to leave the plane as state security men would check the plane and passengers.

A cold breeze greeted me, as I stepped onto Middle East soil for the first time. It was a relief to walk on land again. But I could sense that security men were watching us as we walked towards the terminal building in single file.

As a group of Arab men sat talking casting curious glances at us, security men checked us thoroughly, probably for hidden weapons and drugs.

In a region where terrorism was common at the time, I was fearful of hijackers. But to fantasise it really happened to us seemed adventurous - provided I lived to tell the tale.

Here I was, an Engan, flying in a big jet away from home seeing far off lands. To eat and sleep in the plane - to watch the sun set and dawn breaking from thousands of feet above the earth was a unique experience of a life-time. My long walks to school back home seemed worthwhile.

Through the early morning fog, I saw glimpses of a sea. Were we flying over the Mediterranean Sea? In the distance, I saw some cliffs – the White Cliffs of Dover?

Yes, they certainly were. I had seen pictures of them and then I knew, we were flying over the English Channel. Excitement welled up in me at my first sight of the United Kingdom. Well laid out farms resembled sweet potato patches back in Enga province.

For the first time in my life, I was on the other side of the world. As the seconds ticked away, it was strange to feel a sudden fear - a fear of uncertainty of what lay ahead. Even though I had been looking forward to this day, I suddenly dreaded it, I did not want to leave the safety of the plane.

But as the 747 came to a halt at the North Terminal at London’s Gatwick Airport I boldly followed the other passengers. At the passenger check point foreigners were separated from the citizens,
which enabled swift processing of hundreds of travellers coming to England every day.

At the hotel, I was assisted by a helpful young man. He was Caucasian but had the features of an albino. He told me he was a student at a nearby university. He was doing part-time work as a receptionist/porter at the hotel to pay for his education.

In PNG, millions and millions was spent every year on free education but in the UK, students worked part-time to earn money to pay for their own education. I thought the end result would be to produce a self-reliant, humble citizen brought forth through their education system.
Translation: ‘A warm welcome to Cardiff’ in Welsh. It was a complicated language and I found it hard to pronounce some of the words. I couldn’t even pronounce Cymru, the Welsh name for Wales.

Wales, like Scotland, England and Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom. It retains its own culture. Road directions and other signs were written both in English and Welsh, just like PNG where important information is written in all three national languages – Motu, Pidgin and English.

“How are you doing there?” Mr Val Williams asked me as I tried desperately to take in the sights of the city of London from a window seat, which for the most part was covered in haze.

“Oh Sir, I am doing fine,” I said.

From time to time he pointed out historical landmarks and sights of interest as we drove along a clean four-lane highway. When we drove past a solitary castle, Val said it was Windsor Castle.

“You see the flag on the tower up there?” Val said. “The Queen must be in the castle now. If it’s not flying, she is out on assignment somewhere.”

I recalled stories in school about the Kings and Queens of England. As well as stories like *Jack and the Beans Stalk*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Puss in Boots*, and famous novels like *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*, *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped* and *Ivanhoe*. 
The details in the stories now became apparent when I saw the picturesque countryside - the rolling hills, farm houses, forests, castles and other charming places unwinding before me as in a movie.

I was lost in thought, I didn’t notice the bus arrive at the hotel that would be our home in Cardiff the capital of Wales.

Cardiff was always lively on the weekends. Like in the vegetable markets in Enga Province, English potatoes were plentiful here. Biting deep into juicy apples, I’d buy from one of the many stalls on the streets, I spent lengthy periods watching chalk artists painting pictures on the pavements. And I joined the crowds to watch singers perform Welsh folk songs live.

My visit to the Welsh Folk Museum at St Fagans offered me a unique experience of Welsh life as one of Britain’s foremost open-air museums representing the life and culture of Wales.

I saw an Elizabethan Manor House and took photographs in the formal gardens within the containing wall of a Norman Castle. I saw re-erected farm houses, cottages, the Rhy-r-car-terraced houses showing the evolution of building styles and living conditions in the past.

I visited a Victorian school and sat down on one of the benches where school kids of long ago sat and wondered what they may have been taught.

The most adventurous of my colleagues were two Caribbean Islanders, Tony Capron from the Bahamas and Sanka Price from Barbados. The three of us explored many other parts of Wales.

We visited the eerily quiet Weobly Castle perched on a hill near Swansea, a city in the south of Cardiff. On another occasion, we drove north to visit the Big Pit, an ancient coal mine, now a tourist attraction.

We were given a truly memorable underground tour. As we descended the 300ft shaft to the black heart of the mine, I saw how tough the miners were and the dangerous life they led. There were underground stables where horses were kept to haul the coal, the workshops, and old engines and of course the coal faces.

This was in stark contrast to the Porgera Open Pit mine in Enga Province where huge trucks and modern technology was used and the gold produced 24 hours a day.

From the coal mine the three of us headed for the Brecon Beacons National Park. We saw the spectacular industrial valleys of
South Wales made famous throughout the world by films such as ‘How Green was My Valley.’

Sanka Price at the wheel skillfully negotiated the narrow winding roads that went right over the top of the hills from one valley to the next.

These hills reminded me of drawings I’d seen in a fairy tale Jack and the Beanstalk in which Jack climbs up the magical beanstalk and finds to his amazement a kingdom in the clouds with rolling hills and a white road which leads to a castle inhabited by a cruel giant and his kind hearted wife.

Another time we visited Caerphilly Castle, a giant stone structure which resembled Kondo Kana, Lungu Kana and Supim Kana - three low rocky outcrops back home. The only difference was that people built this structure, beginning in 1268.

I also visited Castell Coch an enchanting little castle - a combination of Victorian Gothic fantasy and timeless fairy tale which peeps unexpectedly through the trees on the hills north of Cardiff.

I gazed at this mystical little castle and wondered if modern skyscrapers were strong enough to stand the test of time. These timeless attractions were drawing hundreds of overseas visitors who paid millions of pounds for the British purse.

In 1987 nearly six million people had visited historic sites and paid 122 million pounds at the gates. And this income was increasing every year.

I wondered how well the people and the PNG government were looking after historical sites like the old House of Assembly, old burial sites, ancestral worship grounds, war relics - which could generate revenue for families and the country through promotion of cultural and tourism activities.

Something I noticed about the British country folk was that they were always kind, polite and seemed to have all the time to help other people. They even trusted you.

On big coaches, you could help yourself to coffee, snacks and soft drinks on sale in a corner. You would be expected to pay the right amount and leave the money in a tray.

In Cardiff, on a very cold afternoon in 1989 I was walking home with a hot bath in my mind when a young man stopped his bicycle directly in front of me.

Without the least hesitation he asked, “Where are you from?”
“Why?” I asked.

“That’s a *bilum* you’re carrying,” he said pointing to my string bag.

“So, you’ve been to my country?”

“Yes, I can tell you’re from New Guinea. I was there for six and a half months. In the Highlands of Mt Hagen, I saw lots of men dressed just like you. I liked your people, they were kind to me.”

We burst into laughter and shook hands over and over again. We must have created a scene on the street but I did not care. Here was somebody who had been to my country.

The young man was Steven Sula, the younger of two sons born to immigrant parents from Eastern Europe. He took me to his house where his mother cooked us a delicious meal.

Even at age 24, Sula had explored many parts of PNG and other parts of the world. Whilst in PNG, he had taken part in a Mekeo *singsing*, chewed betel nut, danced to string band music, eaten local food, chopped firewood in the village and paddled canoes.

“You can never say you’ve been to another country unless you’ve mixed with the people,” he assured me.

I agreed with him. While I was in the UK, I did exactly that. I tasted the local food, sipped the local brews, visited famous places and talked with as many people as I could.

Sula had easily spotted me not just by my *bilum* but because of my Highlands cap and long beard. On a visit to Caerphilly Castle, two young men said they wanted to buy their own caps.

“Excuse me sir, that’s a nice cap you’ve got. Where do you get one? We want to buy our own,” one said.

“I don’t think you can buy them anywhere near here,” I replied. “I brought it from my own country, Papua New Guinea, an island state in the Pacific.”

I said to them that, if they went to PNG, they would find many more caps like the one I was wearing.

In London I caught up with Dr Barry Richardson. In 1985 he was my lecturer in psychology for a semester at UPNG. I met him at Baker Street underground tube station.

Dr Richardson had spotted my distinctive Highlands cap bobbing along among the hundreds of people who flowed seemingly endlessly in and out of the station.

As I waited for my train, I noticed a man with wavy grey hair staring at me from three metres away. I stared back and he surprised
me with a smile. Then I recognised him.

“Dr Barry?”

“Yes! What are you doing here? And what is your name again?” he asked politely.

He said, he missed PNG very much and hoped to return one day. He bade farewell with the request I pass his greetings to Levi Panda an Engan colleague and boarded a train which took off into a dark hole.

There he had been standing right next to me and now he was gone. I could not say to him, “Wait a moment, let’s talk some more, I am kind of homesick.” London moves very fast indeed.

Even though Dr Richardson invited me to visit him at Regents College, I did not have the time. I too was caught up in the fast life. I could not afford to waste precious time like some of us do in PNG.

Soon, I met a fellow Engan who had experienced the fast life in the United Kingdom before I went there. He had been living very close to me but yet I hadn’t met him because he was a busy student at the University of Wales in Cardiff.

I met Lason Watai with whom I had attended high school. I was a year ahead of him when he did grade 7 in 1973 at St Paul’s Lutheran High School at Pausa, Wapenamanda.

In 1977. He came and did the same Communications Engineering course, I did at the University of Technology in Lae. But in my third year I didn’t do well in trade subjects. Instead of repeating, I switched to radio broadcasting and later trained as a journalist at the University of Papua New Guinea.

I suddenly met Lason one morning in the Student Union building at the University of Wales in Cardiff. I saw a black man coming towards me talking with an Asian student, perhaps Chinese. He stunned me with: “Kaimi, imba aipyuu kyala,” meaning ‘Brother, what are you doing here?’

What a shock, what a thrill to meet him. I could have recognised him first if it wasn’t for his glasses. He was a lecturer at the University of Technology in Lae, but was now doing a masters course at the university.

That evening I met his wife from Simbu and their two beautiful children. While food was cooking, we had soft drinks and conversed in tok pidgin and the Enga language. Soon, it was time for supper. Mrs Watai had prepared a really nice typical PNG dish - chicken, English
potatoes, rice and lots of vegetables.

Soon, there was nothing left on the plate she had served me. How sweet it was to taste something so familiar.

How did I become a journalist to enjoy a meal in a wantok’s flat in Cardiff, far away from our homeland?

I could have been anything, a chemical technologist, electrical engineer or even a pilot.

While I attended the University of Technology, the course allowed for us to do practical work with the National Broadcasting Commission in Port Moresby for six months. In 1977 I was tempted to sneak away from work to do an entry test to train as an army pilot.

An advertisement appeared in the newspapers which called for young men who wished to train as army pilots to go to Taurama Army barracks and sit for an entry test.

Over a hundred or so applicants turned up. Of them all, only fifteen of us had passed. I discovered three of us were Engans – one from the Ambum Valley, me from Kandep and Ted Paki from Wabag.

Of the fifteen, only seven candidates were to be selected to do pilot training in Australia. Eight were to be eliminated through rigorous medical tests. I was on a bed doing my blood pressure tests when a doctor politely told me to step down from a high bed. He said I was passing sugar ++ (plus, plus) in my urine sample.

I couldn’t tell the doctor, I had chewed some sugarcane at Murray Barracks offered to me by a wantok when we waited there to be transported down to Taurama Barracks for the examinations.

Outside I met the guy from Ambum Valley who had also failed his medical examination. We both hoped that Ted Paki would make it. And he sure did. Now his daughter, Beverley is a captain with Air Niugini following in her father’s footsteps.

None of my elder children were interested to train as journalists but I am just as proud one of them is a medical doctor, another is an imaging technologist both working with the health department and two are teachers. A fifth child is doing an arts course at the University of PNG. Perhaps one of my younger children still in high school will follow in my footsteps and take up a career in the media.

One day in 1967, my Grade 2 teacher told us to dress smartly the following morning. He said a Radio Man from the state-run National Broadcasting Commission station, Radio Western Highlands, would
be coming to record our songs.

I was at the front and singing with much enthusiasm into the microphone. I watched the Radio Man’s every move as he turned knobs and flicked switches, changed batteries and tape reels and signalled us when to sing and when to stop.

It was awesome to watch the two tape spools spinning round and round. With a primitive background, I could not possibly comprehend the operations of the portable recording machine.

Before he departed, the Radio Man told us to listen to our songs in a special children’s program transmitted over Radio Western Highlands. I never heard the songs because there was no radio in my village in those days.

Twelve years later, I met the Radio Man when I signed up as a broadcast officer with Radio Western Highlands. It was mid-1979 and he was the late Paul Lare, who became my best friend and an inspiration as I began my career in the media.

I never dreamt that one day I would be a broadcaster and a journalist. I grew up with the understanding that, when they left school, people only worked as policeman, warders, aid post orderlies, interpreters, drivers and perhaps kiaps.

I was among the first people from my area to complete Grade 10 in 1975 and then I found myself finishing my education at Idubada Technical College in Port Moresby, so very far from Kandep.

I had been selected to study chemical technology, electrical engineering and communications engineering at the University of Technology. The Education Department made a mistake in offering me three courses instead of one. But I didn’t have a clue what any of them was about.

Except I knew the word ‘communication’ and thought that maybe communications engineering involved people talking on the radio, so I chose to do the course.

Radio played a huge role in those days and impacted very much on the lives of rural Papua New Guineans. Many members of parliament were former radio personalities including Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare himself. People believed what they heard on the radio in those days. What was said on the radio had to be important.

In my third year at the University of Technology, I performed poorly as the course became more technical. I could repeat subjects at my own expense but could not raise the funds. My parents were
poor and lived a subsistence life in the village.

But, luckily, I had been sponsored by the National Broadcasting Commission to study Communications Engineering to qualify to work as a technical officer when I graduated.

At the time, it was Sam Piniau, chairman of the NBC, who kindly allowed my request to work as a broadcast officer to raise funds and then return to my studies. Other broadcasters like Ian Dunn and Don Penias provided the guidance I needed.

I was posted to Radio Western Highlands where I met Paul Lare – the announcer who had recorded our songs many years before. I worked under William Kundin, who was the station manager and other radio personalities like Michael Namba, Paul Piel, James Kapo, Paul Ray, Jennifer Pahun, Anna Pundia, Paul Yane, Mathew Tena, Michael Mekela, Tony Mell and others.

Two former radio announcers, Kindi Lawi and Raphael Doa, were now members of parliament – one the member for Hagen Open and the other Regional member of Western Highlands which included Enga.

Very soon I was popular, particularly among crazy girls who came to the studio door when they heard me on air asking me to play their favourite song during the *Laik bilong Wanwan* late night music show.

A colleague, 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 joined the staff of 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 easily be voted out of office at the next election.

So, in 1983, I joined a K8 million World Bank sponsored provincial development project, called Enga Yakaa Lasemana or EYL for short, as an Information Officer. EYL in the Enga language means ‘Enga Awake’.

Communication development was one of the project components. Of five staff recruited to the new Media Unit, I was understudy to a British VSO volunteer, Archie Markham.

Archie and I started the *Enga Newsletter* produced on several sheets of typewritten A4 paper folded together. We sat at a light table with glue, scissors, Letraset, rulers and rubber 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 PNG. This was the beginning of my exciting career in journalism.

The UK-based Thomson Foundation, the US-based Alfred Friendly Press Foundation and the National Press Foundation offered me scholarships in 1989, 1991 and 2008 respectively in recognition of my efforts to remain in my province and publish a worthwhile newspaper.

I also contributed – and continue to contribute - news and feature stories to the *Post Courier, The National, Sunday Chronicle* and *Paradise Magazine*.

When it was time to celebrate PNG’s centenary celebrations commemorating 100 years of outside contact, I was asked by the organizing committee to produce a special radio documentary. It was broadcast on NBC’s Karai Service. The tape is in the PNG Collection of UPNG’s Somare Library.

Papua New Guinea has a free press, much like in America, Great Britain and other free democracies. There is no government control over what is published or broadcast. But many people in PNG do not have the capacity 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 only at huge cost.

Our two dailies, two weeklies, two commercial TV stations, one commercial FM station and the National Broadcasting Commission are all Port Moresby based. Almost all are foreign owned.

Except for the NBC, few of these organisations have regional or provincial representation. Only recently has the *Post Courier* and *The National* begun to establish regional bureaus in Lae, Mt Hagen, Rabaul, Tari and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville. And EMTV recently opened an office in Lae.

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 - happen here.

I have reported on these issues without fear or favour in the hope that, one day, my province and country will struggle free from these social woes.

Perhaps, the biggest accomplishment in my career has been to live and work among my own 300,000 people opening their eyes and ears to the outside world. And alerting them to dangers like HIV/AIDS that threaten their very existence.

Before coming back to PNG from England, I gave two Highlands caps to Mr Val Williams and Ms Patsy Robertson to show my appreciation to the organisations they represented - The Thomson Foundation and the Commonwealth Media Development Fund. These two organisations made my study trip to the UK possible.

Before producing the caps I said: “I want to give a small present to each of you - something which I am sure will make you remember me,” pointing to my own cap on my head. Everybody in the hall of Cardiff Castle where we had the farewell function laughed and applauded.

I can now picture in my mind, the cap I gave Val Williams hanging among the PNG carvings in the living room of his home in Cardiff Wales bearing testimony to PNG’s rich and varied cultures.
Archie Markham's View of Enga & Dying for a Drink

The late Edward Archie Markham who lived in Enga for two years was from Montserrat in the Caribbean and a naturalised citizen of the United Kingdom.

I was Archie’s under-study in 1983 when he worked as the Media Coordinator in the Department of Enga Administration.

As alluded to earlier, we had been recruited under the communication development component of the World Bank project in the province.

Archie was a widely published poet and writer of short stories. He became familiar with the Enga culture and way of life and his *Papua New Guinea Sojourn: More Pleasures of Exile* (1997) tells the story of his life in Enga Province.

It was the last of eight books he published before he died of a heart attack in March 2008.

In 1989, I met Archie again - in London. He had never expected to see me again but I surprised him with a telephone call when I was on scholarship with the Thomson Foundation in Cardiff. He was writer-in-residence at the University of Ulster.

“Fantastic, fantastic, Daniel, this is unbelievable,” he said and we agreed to meet at his Iranian wife’s residence at Highgate in London during the Easter break.

He had loaded his fridge with meat and lots of drinks and asked me to help myself.

“You can eat and drink anything, anytime,” Archie said. “You can watch TV, videotapes anytime you like, Daniel. Don’t feel afraid.”
Archie had observed the Engan way of entertaining a visitor and he remembered the downside.

He said Engans regarded human life as a cheap commodity comparable with pigs and cash and they were very careless too, particularly with brand new vehicles.

He poured out his thoughts as he drove me on a sightseeing tour of the city, including Covent Garden where he had recited some of his poetry in public.

“I’m impressed with the way people drive here,” I said. “There are masses of cars but not many accidents; no smashed cars on the side of the road, very impressive.”

Archie said that, during his two years in PNG, he was alarmed at the rate at which private and government cars - some brand new - were wrecked. People never took the costs into consideration.

“Not only that,” he said. “Your people never felt tired paying compensation for deaths resulting from vehicle accidents or tribal fights. I always wondered where they got all the money and pigs.”

Tight-lipped, I listened to Archie. He wasn’t exaggerating. He was telling me, an Engan, some basic facts which I couldn’t deny.

Our drinking habits and their associated problems was another concern of Archie’s. “Alcohol abuse must be massively reduced, or it will destroy Enga,” he warned.

True to Archie’s expectation, people continued to die in Enga Province.

On a starless night in September 1992 a brand new Toyota Stout laden with liquor was approaching Mendi town in the Southern Highlands.

Three people were in the front cabin. Three others were perched at the back on top of their precious cargo. They were all drunk except one elderly man.

The companions had loaded the good stuff in Kundiawa, Simbu Province, driven through Mt Hagen and were now heading south towards Mendi.

From Margarima they intended to circuit back to Enga to Kandep and up to Laiagam before ending up at the mining township of Porgera where they expected to make a fortune selling the booze.

They drove this circuitous route under cover of darkness to avoid the 24-hour police road block on the border of Western Highlands,
which was enforcing a liquor ban imposed by the provincial government.

At exactly 10:30pm at Kiburu village the driver lost control as he tried to manoeuvre a bend at high speed. The fully laden truck smashed through the railing on the bridge of the Mendi River and plunged straight into the icy water.

The three men on the back were able to swim to safety and alerted villagers of their predicament. But the three men in the cabin were trapped and they drowned.

Nobody heard the deafening crash or the big splash as the truck hit the surface in the middle of the Mendi River. When the ripples had subsided the river continued to flow innocently as it had done for ages past.

Next morning, police divers recovered the bodies as well as a substantial amount of beer and spirits worth thousands of kina on the black-market.

If the drink didn’t get you one way, it was certainly able to get you another.

A man in his mid-forties with a dark complexion approached me one evening before I was even seated in one of the two bars of the Hotel Diplomat in Cardiff.

“Hello, my name is Bernard,” he said. “I am Portuguese. And I can see that you are a stranger around here. Allow me to buy you a drink.”

“Yes, I’m new to Wales; and thanks for the offer,” I said cautiously.

“Well, let’s sit down, have some drinks and talk,” he said, offering me a bar stool. “It’s good to meet a new friend.”

And so we drank and talked into the evening. He appeared well schooled and expressed himself well.

Our topics ranged from food to politics. But the subject that took up most of our discussion was how society the world over had become more violent.

The poll tax issue and subsequent rioting at Trafalgar Square in Central London was a classic example.

The violence and looting were said to be the worst in London that century. Shoppers and tourists were terrorised. Fifty eight police and 86 civilians needed hospital treatment. Many people were affected as damage to property ran into millions of pounds.

69
A situation like this led to the Bougainville crisis, which claimed thousands of innocent lives and destroyed property worth millions of kina. The national government and Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) leaders could surely have resolved the issue peacefully instead of taking up arms.

So, in that hotel bar in Cardiff, my Portuguese acquaintance and I talked about peace.

When our first pints ran out, Bernard offered to buy a second round. But I stopped him and insisted it was my turn.

“I’m the one who invited you. I should buy,” he argued.

“No,” I said firmly. “Please accept my offer. From where I come from, we give and take.” After two more rounds we shook hands, bade farewell and retired for the night.

Something I realised among the English folk was that even if people were under the influence, they were generally well behaved. I didn’t see many drunken brawls or rough singing in local dialects so common in clubs and taverns in PNG.

Here nobody stood around the bars with empty bottles of beer expecting a wantok to come along to buy them another.

Although, it is customary to give and take through our tee or moka barter exchange system, alcohol was never an item of exchange in Highlands society. It was never brewed and never heard of. It was introduced to the people through European contact.

Within 50 years of outside contact, the Highlands region caught up with the rest of the country in terms of social, economic and political development.

But the rapid change had its negative impacts. Substances like alcohol quickly found their way into the fabric of established Highlands society and became incorporated into traditional networks and exchange systems and caused violence.

“Violence and disorder are occurring in menacing proportions throughout the PNG Highlands,” wrote Dr Wari Iamo and Joseph Ketan in their 1992 book, How Far under the Influence?

The mass media continues to be filled with grotesque occurrences of gang rapes, armed robberies, religious killings and tribal fights throughout the Highlands and the whole country.

Iamo and Ketan found that highlanders were spending enormous amounts of money on alcohol.
Of 25 cases of tribal fights between 1986 and 1990, eleven (44%) were alcohol related. Alcohol abuse was also a key factor in the rise in domestic violence and road accidents.

The researchers made ten recommendations, one of which emphasised the need for more education.

But it seems, 23 years after these recommendations were made and long after I shared a couple of pints with Bernard at the Hotel Diplomat in Cardiff, nothing much has changed in our world.
Women at Work and Poverty on the Streets of London and New York. And PNG?

Men in Enga were like a banana tree that is bent, never to grow straight again. They kept their distance from women and never involved them in decision making. Women were subservient to men always.

I was told in the hausman never to be alone with a woman for lengthy periods of time. “Even if you know the woman is your brother’s wife, never be alone with her. You don’t know what your brother will think.”

One day in March, 1989, I waved down a taxi at the market near the docks in Cardiff. When it stopped, I didn’t know if I should let it pass me by. To my absolute horror, I saw a woman sitting behind the steering wheel.

“Where to?” she asked puffing on a cigarette and blowing the smoke out of the window. I was spellbound for a moment. Then, brushing aside my traditional understanding, I climbed in beside her. Over the few minutes of my ride to the hotel where I was staying, I found this lady to be charming and of good cheer.

She had been driving her taxi for the last 15 years. She told me about Cardiff, the Welsh people and how she liked driving people around the city.

“I like it here. I want to stay here and serve people, including visitors like yourself,” she said. “I don’t want to go anywhere else, Cardiff is my city.”
She probably thought I was from the Middle East due to my light brown complexion and beard. My Highlands cap covered my tight curly hair.

“In Iran or Iraq and other countries there, women are restricted to do certain things, even covering their faces,” she giggled. “But in Wales it is different, we women can do anything.”

Alison Sergeant was another charming woman I met in the UK. She was news editor of BBC’s Radio Cambridgeshire in East Anglia and should inspire women in PNG.

Alison told me she was the only person without a university degree on the news staff but was in charge of twelve other reporters. Her story was one of determination and consistent hard work coupled with a desire to learn which brought her success.

She started her journalism career at age 18 and trained on the job for three years, gaining hands-on experience in print, radio and television.

Her parents did not want her to work in the media industry. “But I knew journalism was my right career,” she said. “Now I am head of a news organisation.”

Her story seemed a bit like mine. She laughed a lot when she recalled how hard it was to look after two children and her commitment to work. At 40, her children now aged 10 and 15, she felt free.

“It was hard to be a mother and wife. I always organised things for the children,” she smiled. “You have to have a tolerant family and you have to be sensitive to their needs.”

She felt the United Kingdom was slow to encourage women to advance to the top. I told her about the situation of women in PNG and how they were beginning to hold important positions in government and the private sector.

But it will take a few more years before PNG women can safely drive taxis on the streets of Port Moresby.

After that we, me and my colleagues from eleven other commonwealth countries went to London for a week to visit media organisations.

James Serugo from Uganda, and I decided to explore the city one afternoon. We crossed Baker Street and went into the underground tube station anddeparted on the Circle Line.
We intended to see as much of the city as possible. At our first stop, Victoria, we came across a girl begging.

Her memory will always be in my mind. She was young and pretty, only in her teens. She had short blond hair, blue eyes and was of medium built. She was pushing a baby in a pram at the entrance to the subway at Victoria in the heart of London.

“Ten pence please, only ten pence. See I have this baby to feed. Please give me ten pence,” she said, reaching out a hand to anybody who passed.

We did not know if the young girl was the mother of the baby or just from a poor family trying to collect a few more coins to supplement a meagre income.

I suddenly realised I had the wrong assumption that whitemen had everything. There were poor and disadvantaged people everywhere in the world.

We gave the girl a few coins and walked away embarrassed. But a similar scene replayed itself for all the time I was in the UK.

There are many reasons why people, including children, turn to the streets. They include unemployment, alcoholism and lack of accommodation.

There are estimated to be two million Londoners who make their living from begging, government allowances, charity or theft.

At the time two charities were trying to raise half a million pounds for new hostels and backup services in the city.

To launch the program, TV star Esther Rantzen went to see poor people under a bridge in the Bullring at Waterloo. She talked with the 23-year old mother of three at the entrance to her shelter of broken crates.

“It’s going to take a lot of help to give her and the other people here what they want – a home, a lifestyle and hope for the future,” Rantzen said.

Surrounded by makeshift cardboard panels, dirty blankets and worn-out sleeping bags, Rantzen chatted to long term residents in this cast-off society.

One of them, 21 year old Paddy who had lived there for seven years, explained: “Once there were only six or seven of us. Now there are 2,000 and there will be more in the summer.”
Rantzen is well known for her work with various charities including The Silver Line, designed to combat loneliness, which she set up in 2012.

Two years later on another continent, as I stood under the imposing Empire State Building in New York, a man came out from nowhere and started to sing - the words I could not easily understand. Nearby, seven people, apparently homeless, were sleeping peacefully on cardboard.

The man asked if he could sing again but this time he wanted some form of payment: a cigarette, maybe a few coins. I held out a two dollar note. My friends searched for coins in their pockets.

The man rattled off some more songs. It was fascinating how some street people provided entertainment so they did not take money from people for nothing.

The man thanked us and went back to sleep on his piece of cardboard with the Empire State Building towering over him.

In London and New York, it seemed like a bad dream to see these people lying around. The UK and the USA, two of the world’s most advanced countries, yet poor people lived on the streets.

But what about Papua New Guinea, I thought?

“Never!” I assured myself. “We have land to fall back on if a person loses his job or a student drops out of the education system.”

People must continue to own land like their ancestors have done. Land is a living soul, the lifeblood of an individual, which must never be traded even for a billion bucks.

PNG does not really have homeless beggars. The people, mostly handicapped, we see on the streets of Port Moresby, Lae and Mt Hagen with small signs are not really beggars. They can readily be looked after by relatives.

But steps must be taken now to ensure protection and help for the poor. If not our main towns could soon see degrading rows of outstretched hands seeking help from the society that put them there.

One of the striking sociological carry-over effects of traditional values and norms into urban areas is the wantok system prevalent in PNG.

Public officers are often accused of corrupt practises when they tend to give first preference to their relatives as opposed to being rational and treat everybody fairly.
While it is true *wantokism* is a hindrance to development, it does play a positive role particularly useful in urban settings. It is handy in situations where a *wantok* will not give cold stares, rude responses or ignore people who are in need.

I believe, *wantokism* applied in the right situations is useful to society.

But what sort of a society will PNG have become if *wantoks* allow their kin to beg? Will the people have changed completely if they ignore their own blood relatives?
Acid Rain, OK Tedi Environmental Damage & Softening the Impact of Change at Porgera

In Wales, I was bemused by the rolling hills dotted with eerily quiet and empty castles, priories and cathedrals - a brush with mankind’s immediate past.

On the other side of the UK, in East Anglia, I became aware of the present situation on earth - rapid advances in medicine, science, technology and industry.

But yet, this planet may be on the brink of extinction. The air we breathe, the water we drink, the seas we fish, the soils we farm, the forests, animals and plants which surround us are all in danger.

The Highlands provinces in PNG used to be very cold but it is getting warmer. Trees like coconuts, buai and mangoes, which normally grow on the coast are already bearing fruit in the region.

Although illiterate the people can sense that the times are changing. They constantly talk about it in their hausman, on public transport and in market places.

But they were not aware of the new terms and words which describe these changes - acid rain, the greenhouse effect, global warming, holes in the ozone layer, desertification and industrial pollution.

The village people do not know that industrialized countries like Great Britain, America, Japan, China and many others with all their big factories and machines are responsible for causing the earth to become warm and causing coconuts to bear nuts in the Highlands.

More gases and waste escapes from cars. Rubbish, oil spillages and detergents damage river systems and seas. Forests give timber and
paper but are being cleared for rich mines like Porgera and OK Tedi. The loss of trees results in soil erosion and endangered wildlife.

Also, in developing countries, poverty causes people to change their environment - to overgraze grasslands, to cut down trees for new land and firewood or farm poor soil for food.

A situation has developed in the world where one country’s pollution is another’s acid rain and rising sea levels. The results of mankind’s actions are universal. But it is time now man learnt to manufacture and transport goods, and produce the food we need in ways which do not harm the environment.

At the end of April, we left Cardiff by train to visit many parts of East Anglia to see how action was being taken to conserve the environment. As we drove to a hotel, I saw many bicycles on the streets and packed in front of buildings.

People were beginning to realize that cycling was not only good for the health but kind to the environment. And there was less congestion on the roads.

Raleigh, the company that sold bicycles, said bike sales had rocketed from 1.5 million sold in 1986 to 2.8 million in 1989.

And in all of Europe, bicycle sales have overtaken cars. In Italy bikes outsold cars for the first time since WWII. And this trend was seen across twenty three other European member countries.

But weren’t the people crazy to suddenly ride bicycles after all the damage done to the environment?

I sort of blamed the Dutch, German and British colonisers who came to the island of New Guinea for their lack of insight. Why hadn’t they introduced cheaper and safer modes of transport like horse drawn carts and bicycles to the local people?

For centuries the people in the Highlands had walked up and down steep gorges and mountain passes with heavy loads on their backs barefoot. And people on the coast paddled canoes on the seas and waterways of the lowland plains. These modes of travel were friendly to the environment.

People in PNG may think it is a shameful thing to do but collecting empty cans and selling them to dealers for recycling is one way of keeping our environment clean.

In Port Moresby, the city council encouraged people to collect plastic bags to sell to dealers to earn a little income.
But big mining companies in PNG cut deep into the mountains for copper, gold and other precious metals and built modern highways which enable people to enjoy modern comfort. But the exhaust fumes from the cars and trucks they use is one of the causes of environmental damage.

When the fumes from vehicles and gases from industries and power stations combine with moisture in the air to make sulphuric and nitric acid - this solution falls as acid rain. These acids pollute water and soil and destroys many living things, including trees and fresh water fish.

Acid rain is not yet evident in PNG but over time the effects will be seen.

But environmental destruction on a large scale due to the tailings dam collapse at the giant OK Tedi open pit mine in the Western Province has been devastating.

The destruction began in 1984, even before I went to the United Kingdom.

According to a report on Wikipedia, the Ok Tedi environmental disaster caused grave harm to the environment along 1,000 kilometres of the Ok Tedi River and the Fly River in the Western Province between about 1984 and 2013.

PNG has other large open pit mines like Porgera, Lihir, Tolokuma, Misima and Panguna which are associated with environmental destruction issues but the destruction caused to the environment. The OK Tedi Mine destruction was one of the worst.

The lives of 50,000 people was disrupted in one of the worst environmental disasters caused by humans. It was a consequence of the discharge of about two billion tons of untreated mining waste into the Ok Tedi from the mine.

This mining pollution, due to the collapse of the Ok Tedi tailings dam system in 1984 and the lack of a proper waste retention facility, was the subject of class action litigation by local landowners against Ok Tedi Mining Limited and BHP Billiton.

Villagers downstream from Ok Tedi in the Fly River system in the Middle Fly District and the southern and central areas of the North Fly District, in particular, believe that the effect on their livelihood from this disaster far outweighs the benefits they have received from the mine's presence in their area.
In 1999, BHP admitted that 90 million tons of mine waste was annually discharged into the river for more than ten years and destroyed downstream villages, agriculture and fisheries. Mine wastes were deposited along 1,000 kilometres of the Ok Tedi and the Fly River below its confluence over an area of 100 square kilometres.

BHP's CEO, Paul Anderson, said that the Ok Tedi Mine was "not compatible with our environmental values and the company should never have become involved."

As of 2006, mine operators continued to discharge 80 million tons of tailings, overburden and mine-induced erosion into the river system each year. About 1,588 square kilometers of forest has died or is under stress. As many as 3,000 square kilometres may eventually be harmed, an area equal to the U.S. state of Rhode Island or the Danish island of Funen.

Following heavy rainfall, mine tailings are swept into the surrounding rain forest, swamps and creeks, and have left behind 30 square kilometres of dead forest. Thick gray sludge from the mine is visible throughout the Fly River system, although its effects downriver are not as severe.

Chemicals from the tailings killed or contaminated fish, although they are still eaten by the people of the surrounding villages. However, fish counts decrease closer to the mine. The massive amount of mine-derived waste dumped into the river exceeded its carrying capacity.

This dumping resulted in the river bed being raised 10 metres, causing a relatively deep and slow river to become shallower and develop rapids, thereby disrupting indigenous transportation routes. Flooding, caused by the raised riverbed, left a thick layer of contaminated mud on the flood plain among plantations of taro, bananas and sago palm that are the staples of the local diet.

About 1300 square kilometres were damaged in this way. The concentration of copper in the water is about 30 times above the standard level, but it is below the World Health Organization (WHO) standards.

The original plans included an Environmental Impact Statement that required a tailings dam to be built. This would allow heavy metals and solid particles to settle, before releasing the clean ‘high-water’ into the river system where remaining contaminants would be diluted. In 1984 an earthquake caused the half built dam to collapse.
The company continued operations without the dam, initially because BHP argued that it would be too expensive to rebuild it. Subsequently, the PNG government decided a dam wasn’t necessary, in the wake of the closure of the Panguna mine.

Most of Papua New Guinea's land is held under a system of native title, with ownership divided amongst many small clans, while the central government retains control over how resources that lie under the ground are used.

There are no waste retention facilities on the premises. This allows all ore processing residues, waste rock and overburden to be discharged into the Ok Tedi River.

In the 1990s the communities of the lower Fly Region, including the Yonggom people, sued BHP and received US$28.6 million in an out-of-court settlement, which was the culmination of an enormous public-relations campaign against the company by environmental groups.

As part of the settlement a (limited) dredging operation was put in place and efforts were made to rehabilitate the site around the mine. However the mine is still in operation and waste continues to flow into the river system. BHP was granted legal indemnity from future mine related damages.

In January 2007 PNG lawyer Camillus Narokobi lodged a lawsuit on behalf of 3,000 villagers known as the Ningerum people who live near the Birim River, a tributary of the Ok Tedi River. He is seeking US$4 billion in damages.

The Ok Tedi Mine was scheduled to close in 2013. However, the PNG government has taken over control of the mine and with the support of the local community the mine life was extended. Until that time two thirds of the profits will go into a long-term fund to enable the mine to continue to contribute to the PNG economy for up to half a century after it closes.

The balance is allocated to current development programs in the Western Province and PNG more generally. Experts have predicted that it will take 300 years to clean up the toxic contamination.

In 2013 the PNG government seized 100% ownership of Ok Tedi Mine and repealed laws that would allow people to sue mining giant BHP Billiton over environmental damage.
Ok Tedi Mining Limited launched the OT2025 project that is focused on transitioning the business to a smaller operation in preparation for Mine Life Extension.

Community consent for the mine’s life to be extended to 2025 was endorsed by the Mine Associated Communities, which is made up of 156 villages, through the signing of the respective Community Mine Continuation Extension Agreements by the Community representatives and OTML at the end of 2012 and beginning of 2013.

The signing of the Agreements facilitated the Company to commence planning for the MLE project throughout 2013.

The world class Porgera Gold Mine is located in Enga Province. It has also faced some major controversies since it poured the first gold bar on August 5th, 1990.

One of the controversies has also been on environmental degradation and the impact this has had on the lives of the people according to Act Now, a PNG based none government organization (NGO) concerned with issues of national importance.

They said the mine emptied millions of tons of tailings and mountains of waste rock directly into the nearby 800 km-long river system.

The waste enters the Porgera River, which drains into the Lagaip River then into the Strickland River and eventually into the Fly River before reaching the Gulf of Papua. The upper reaches of the river system are fast flowing and steep while about 200 km downstream the river enters an extensive flat floodplain where it meanders. Dumping into this major river system began in 1992 and has continued ever since.

The extreme damage this mine waste disposal method caused, as well as concerns about likely environmental toxicity from metals in the mine waste, have been well-documented.

The local people have continued to remain quiet on the impact beginning when construction started after they signed the historic Special Mining Lease on May 12th, 1989.

Mining Watch Canada states that public health concerns from other contamination sources apart from the tailings are also prevalent in Porgera. Many residents, including children, face exposure to mercury.

Mercury is used by residents engaging in small-scale alluvial mining, which includes gold extraction from the waste streams of the
mining operations. Many residents turn to this practice of mining as a means of supplementing their incomes.

Residents can readily purchase mercury from stores and community members report children as young as six years old handling raw mercury as they help their families with the small-scale mining. Residents report that their need to gain income from alluvial mining has increased as the mine’s encroachment on their land has made it more difficult to grow subsistence foods.

And the village people have continued to see the face of their valley change at an alarming rate.

I was able to talk with Pilipolo Oko, who was about 45 years of age at the time the mine started operations. His village of Painadak fell within the Special Mining Lease (SML) area. He had to give it up to the Porgera Joint Venture - the mine developers.

Philipolo was the second born in a family of three boys. His father was a happy man in the village because three sons meant added strength to the family and tribe. He distributed his land to his sons and showed them the clan boundaries.

At about 10 years of age, Philipolo encountered *kiaps* coming to his village. He also saw many other whitemen come and search for a shiny stone called *gol* in the Porgera and Kogai Rivers not far from his village.

This was between 1948 and 1949 when there was a gold rush from Wabag, where a government patrol post had been established by J Clarke six years previously in 1941.

Like his father, Philipolo was ignorant of these visits. He concentrated more on learning traditional skills, like hunting, gardening, building houses and domesticating pigs. And when the moon shone bright in the night he went into the nearby forests to hunt opossums and cassowaries, which were so abundant.

He married four wives from Porgera, Piae La, Kandep and Tari and fathered 13 children - five girls and eight boys. Philipolo was content for he was following in his father’s footsteps at Painadak village.

None of his brothers or any of his children had attempted to go to school after Porgera was brought under government control by the colonial administration and a primary school established at the government outpost there.

It was rather too late for him to realize that the life he knew would be lost forever when construction of the mine commenced. The
whole of the Porgera Valley was catapulted into world headlines, all because of the shiny stone he saw whitemen search for in the two rivers near his village.

High grade gold reserves were discovered on Mt Waruwari and a gold rush at nearby Mt Kare in Paiela had a dramatic impact on the lives of the people. The Porgera Valley experienced change at an alarming rate due to intense economic activity.

The impact this had on Philipolo’s life was beyond control. Old tribal beliefs and customs became meaningless. He saw streams of people from all over the Highlands come into Porgera or on their way to the gold rush at Mt Kare, where a landslide of alluvial gold had been discovered.

The talk in the rest of Enga was about how the once remote Ipili people of Paiela and Porgera were becoming rich by the second and how they were spending their ‘gold money.’

Many school children ran away from classes as public servants resigned in haste to make fast money. Even a provincial government minister abandoned his post and rushed to the gold rush.

Every single day Philipolo heard the deafening sounds of helicopters as if the Vietnam War was being refought in the valley. Prices of store goods soured sky high and simple kanakas like himself were buying expensive motor vehicles. Children were riding bicycles along the dusty roads.

He could explain why all this was happening. Raised in a superstitious society, he had one possible answer - that this was a sign that the world would soon end.

So he convinced himself that he should give up his land together with his houses, gardens, and the yar and pandanus nut trees he had painstakingly planted in his lifetime. Government and mining officials told him his large family had to be relocated to a new site.

His village of Painadak fell within the Special Mining Lease (SML) area. So he gave up his land to the Porgera gold mine developers.

The Special Mining Lease (SML) was negotiated between PJV, landowners, the Enga Provincial Government and the National Government. These negotiations included an equity component, royalties and compensations for losses of property like gardens and houses.

Philipolo wanted to enjoy the equity and compensation payments and the royalty payments he would receive till the mine closed.
Philipolo’s family was not the only one affected. Lots of people from the Pulumani, Tieni, Angalaini, Timoropi and other tribes also gave up their land to PJV.

But Philipolo said later: “I am sorry I gave up my land and property. I was confused. I thought the world would end but I realize I was wrong. But I cannot do anything now, it’s too late.”

The mine was officially opened by Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu on Saturday October 20th, 1990. Placer Dome was the operator until 2006 when Barrick acquired Placer Dome and took over.

The mine is operated by the Porgera Joint Venture (PJV), which is an unincorporated joint venture between Barrick (95%) and the Enga Provincial Government and the Special Mining Lease (SML) landowners (5%). Barrick manages the mine.

The most significant of the whole mine development was the relocation of the landowners whose land and property fell within the Special Mine Lease (SML) zone.

Philipolo and his family were among 3000 people relocated in the largest exodus of people in the history of mine development in the country.

PJV built modern houses at a cost of K14,000 each for relocated landowners whose houses and property were destroyed to pave way for the mine development. The houses had four bedrooms, a bathroom, outside toilet, a 500 gallon tank leading to a sink inside complete with a wood stove.

Philipolo secured three of these houses to accommodate his large family - one for his eldest son and his mother from Paiela, another for himself and his three wives and children.

And the third house he gave to his eldest daughter and her husband. But still he required another two houses to separately accommodate two of his wives.

I joined him on the steps of his house and started a conversation. No sooner was I seated than all his children, wives and visitors surrounded us. No wonder he needed two more houses to accommodate all these people under his charge.

Philipolo complained that he felt embarrassed to send visitors away particularly when it was bed time because his houses were always over crowded.
But he put on a radiant smile when I asked him how it felt to own three brand new permanent houses. The same smile appeared on the faces of every other family I visited on the relocation site.

One major problem Philipolo encountered was the separation from his elder brother and four other relatives, who remained in what was left of their old village of Painadak. Their houses and gardens did not fall within the SML area.

One of them, Mulu Munakap had come to visit him. He said he felt insecure with only four relatives left because they would be easy targets in the event of a tribal fight.

“‘In former times, we felt safe. We were close to each other but now we feel vulnerable and insecure. Our tribe has broken up into fragments,’” he said.

I asked Philipolo if any of the other tribes involved in the relocation exercise were traditional enemies of his Pulumani tribe.

He answered almost immediately that one of the relocated tribes was in fact an enemy tribe and said: “We Pulumani are enemies of this tribe. If trouble comes then we will fight.”

“That means your new houses will be burnt down,” I said.

‘Fighting does not care about women, pigs, children or whatever. We fight,’” he replied with a grin.

Philipolo saw modern houses, health centres, schools and shops continuing to spring up. Roads were being built and a mining township at Suyane developed. And people—both Papua New Guineans and foreigners—kept pouring in.

Every single day helicopters and aeroplanes kept flying into Porgera as huge trucks hauled in parts of machinery and construction never before dreamt of by the people. It was too much for the simple village people to bear.

It is into this mish-mash of worlds at a critical moment that Susan Bonnell, an American social worker appeared among the people as their guardian angel. She offered them expert advice, mostly to the bewildered women and youths.

Susan was not new to the province. She first came to PNG as a tourist in 1964. She had lived and worked in many parts of the country. She had worked in Laiagam, Enga Province for a while and helped women there plant pyrethrum. She also helped them with their social problems and organized woman’s clubs which flourished in those days.
Bonnell was recruited by PJV to do similar work to cushion the impact of change among the Porgera people. She had to deal with many social issues - one the excessive drinking habits of the people, which resulted in a lot of family problems.

“They must have drunk a million kina around the place,” Bonnell said. She also had to deal with the problems that resulted when men married young girls and abandoned their wives and children.

They did it either for sexual preference or perhaps as a way of spending the large sums of money they received as compensation for the loss of their land and property or royalty payments.

And the women were afraid to keep money openly least their husbands demanded it from them to buy alcohol or to gamble.

Susan Bonnell encouraged many women to open passbook accounts with the two banks in Porgera and kept the passbooks in her office away from their abusive husbands.

Bonnell also showed relocated women how to look after their new permanent homes.

“It’s a little uncomfortable for women to move from a traditional to a modern house,” Susan said. “But the women are proud of their houses. They seem happy but we must tell them that you cannot pour pig grease into a modern sink.”
Conservation Efforts in the UK & the Sad State of the Great Kandep Swamplands

Still in East Anglia in the United Kingdom, I met people who were not only using bicycles in preference to motor vehicles but who were dedicated to conserving and protecting all of nature.

Numerous conservation projects had been established in 280 square kilometres of uninterrupted landscape with waterways - shallow lakes known as the broads - teeming with different species of fish together with animals, birds, insect and plant life.

In parts, the broads looked something like the two big swamplands of my own district of Kandep in Enga Province.

The big difference was that my two swamplands were devoid of the flocks of birds I had seen in the 1960s and 1970s, which were disturbed by the planes that took off to take the young men to work on the coastal plantations.

The birds were also disturbed by the Missionary Aviation Fellowship, the weekly government charter plane and Seventh Day Adventist aircraft, which flew in regularly with mail and supplies.

On the lakes there were several boats. One was named Kandep Queen and was used by the kiaps to water ski and shoot the ducks, which were then plentiful. District Commissioner Tom Ellis would fly from Mt Hagen to join in the fun. I used to hear the bang, bang of the guns and watch the boat come to shore with the spoils.

Today, with the widespread introduction of firearms, the ducks have dwindled in numbers due to over hunting by locals and expatriates. Even two colourful species of mountain parrots called Lai and Kakait have stopped coming to feed in old abandoned gardens in the village.
And the Miok Bird of Paradise (Princess Staphanie Austrapa) has stopped coming to the fringes of the village to feed on its favourite fruit tree - the Kaipe ita. It used to look like a black kite floating up and down across the sky with its long black tail feathers swaying in the wind.

Even mountain parrots, the reddish-brown Waiaum - a species from the pigeon family no longer flock in to feed on Angiwan trees.

By contrast, on the broads, the birds, fish, insects and plant life were safe. They were carefully conserved. We were led along a boardwalk which took us through the broad’s various stages from open water to dry oak woodland.

The warden took us on a boat ride on Ranworth Broad, which was quite shallow. Twice the outboard motor blade got tangled in submerged debris and we struggled to get it free and running.

The broads were man made, created during medieval times. People dug them up for peat to use as fuel. The pits were flooded when sea levels rose in the 14th century.

Ranworth Broad is one of about 40 shallow lakes interconnected by waterways and a haven for rare species of birds and other assorted wildlife and plants.

But what had happened to the thick jungles and river systems in my country?

Upon returning to Papua New Guinea, I was imbued with a sense of responsibility to ensure the safety and protection of animal life and eco-systems. I wished people would realise the value of our eco-systems so abundant with animals, plants and insect life and famous for their diversity throughout the scientific world.

Discoveries of rare species are made constantly - some helpful to scientific research like the pitohui, a small poisonous song bird.

The six species of this small brightly coloured bird are native only to the island of New Guinea. It is the first poisonous bird known to science. One hundred milligrams of the bird’s breast meat contains enough toxin to kill a mouse in 20 minutes.

The pitohui’s flesh, as well as its skin and feathers, contain the same nerve toxin that Amazonian Indians extract from frogs to poison their arrows. The toxin is hundreds of times more potent than strychnine.

The discovery could have practical benefits in anaesthesia and in treating arrhythmias of the heart.
A sense of regret came over me: how much animal, plant and insect life had we made extinct due to road construction, mining and deforestation?

United States Vice President Al Gore told the 1993 Waigani Seminar in a special video message: “I am glad you have chosen to focus your seminar on the need to strike a balance between economic development and conservation of the world’s vital resources. We must all get involved if we are to find solutions to our problems of deforestation, global warming, pollution, extinction of species and the unnecessary waste of our natural resources.

“PNG is home to one of the world’s last tropical rain forests. Your forests are not only important to your own people, but to the world’s climate and atmosphere as well. Your many unique plants and animals, thriving in the crossroads between Australia and Asia may hold biological secrets that will bring benefit to people everywhere. In terms of the number of biological species, New Guinea is perhaps the richest island in the world.”

But nobody was making any effort to conserve the two great swamplands of Kandep. The ducks, cormorants, cranes and other birds were no longer there in huge numbers. The fish stock too, introduced only in the 1960s by the colonial administration, had dwindled due to overfishing.

It is indeed a sad state of affairs in Kandep and could be the case in many other parts of the country.

Just as Sir Michael Somare is a father figure in PNG as the first Prime Minister, I came across another father figure involved in world conservation.

For all his life, he had been concerned with the safety, respect for and longevity of planet earth. One of his many projects was the Wildfowl and Wetlands Centre at Welney in East Anglia which we visited.

This man was Sir Peter Markham Scott who died at age 80 when I was in the United Kingdom. It was his wish that after his death an appeal should be launched to ensure that the work he began to save endangered species and their habitat could continue.

He wanted the money raised to be divided equally between the two organisations he founded and which he helped to make into conservation groups of world stature - the Wild Fowl and Wetlands Trust and the World Wide Fund for Nature.
The Sir Peter Scott Memorial Appeal for Conservation was both an appreciation of his work and an initiative to make sure it continues, as he keenly wished.

His Royal Highness, Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, agreed to be president of the appeal and expressed the following words in a letter:

“Mankind has learnt to do many things but it cannot recreate extinct species. Sir Peter Scott’s personal achievements and leadership of the conservation movement have ensured that many species that were on the brink of extinction will have a chance to survive into the future.

“To persuade people living in an industrial age of the need for the conservation of nature, demands a very special talent. To do something practical to achieve it in the face of human selfishness, demands a very special dedication. ‘Sir Peter Scott was abundantly endowed with both the talent and the dedication and he used them with exceptional success.”

Sir Peter Scott was multi-talented and lived each one fully. He was a professional painter but was also ornithologist, naturalist, author, broadcaster, Olympic yachtsman, gliding champion and above all conservationist.

He was born in 1909, the son of Captain Robert Falcon who died on an expedition to the South Pole in 1911.

“Make that boy interested in natural history - they teach it at some schools,” wrote his father in his last message to his wife. Sir Peter Scott’s life-long interest and achievement must have surpassed his father’s wildest dreams.

In 1964, he founded the Wildfowl Trust - now the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust - a non-profit-making organisation devoted to conservation. In the 1950s he worked closely with the international Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) and in 1962 became chairman of their Species Survival Commission.

He organised the Red Data Books, which list plants and animals under threat and which conservationists have come to regard as their ‘bible.’

In 1961 he helped to found the World Wildlife Fund - now the World Wide Fund for Nature - designing its famous panda logo. He was a very active vice president of WWF - UK and Chairman of WWF - International for 20 years.
In 1982, he was made Honorary Chairman of the WWF International Council. He was also President of the Fauna and Flora Preservation Society and held office in many other conservation organisations in Britain and around the world.

It is hardly surprising that in 1973 he was knighted for services to conservation. He became the first person ever to receive such an accolade. Fourteen years later, he was made a Companion of Honour and elected a Fellow of the Royal Society.

During the last forty years, Sir Peter Scott travelled to most parts of the world, delighting in the wildlife and promoting conservation where ever he went. In every continent the name of Sir Peter Scott commands not only a deep and abiding respect but a great deal of affection and gratitude.

“It was his enthusiasm that was his most enduring quality - a bubbling enthusiasm which it is so easy to lose when one gets older,” wrote Gerald Durrell an author and naturalist.

“To be born with all Peter’s gifts is a wonderful thing; what is even more wonderful is the way he managed to share these gifts with so many people all over the world,” Durrell said.

In contrast there are few people in PNG who appear ready to share their talents with other people and develop an interest in their chosen fields as Sir Peter Scott did.

Traditionally, there were few people of renown. The only specialists were magicians, fight leaders, hunters, gardeners, carvers or a good fisherman. The standard for success was seen in political and in economic terms.

In modern times, many Papua New Guineans want to establish their names through being lawyers, doctors, pilots, teachers and such other professions or manage their own businesses.

Most people who get recognised for their services during the Queen’s Birthday Honours list are people who work in such fields.

Once they reach a certain level of success, they tend to enter politics. A few years ago, the late lawyer, Simili Alonke’s name was on everybody’s lips. He won many court cases and became popular within about three years when he worked in the Public Solicitor’s office in Mt Hagen. When election time came many people encouraged him to contest the Enga Regional Seat.

Simili Alonke was like a screen hero, he could convince a judge in the courtroom but not many of the people on the public platform.
Politics, he discovered belonged to a few people with lots of resources. The people were like fish – very slippery and had conned him. The same people he thought were supporting him were also receiving gifts from the other candidates as well.

He did not try to get back to work. He ended up in the village and wasted his talents away. He was depressed and developed an illness and died at the prime age of about 45 leaving behind his three wives and children.

Simili Alonke was the first graduate lawyer from Kandep. He was one of my maternal cousins and a classmate at Mariant Primary School. Our teacher was of course was Fr Gerald J Theis, SVD, the first missionary to our area.

A time will come when professional people will leave politics to a few people, become experts in their chosen fields and establish a name for themselves and leave a legacy behind.
Norman Cathedrals, Thomas Cook, Flag Fen & the Rapid Journey of a Stone Age Highlands People

As I sipped tea in the ancient building in the grounds of the Norman cathedral, I realised how old and modern were intertwined to make Peterborough in England the city it is.

My colleagues from around the world were so captivated by the beauty around them that they wanted to stay there all day.

We had to be told ‘to get a move on’ to our next destination - Nene Park, firmly establishing itself as one of the top ten English country parks.

As we passed over the willow-lined River Nene, our guide asked, “Did you know that the underwater scenes of the James Bond movie Octopussy were filmed here?”

“Oh, really,” I gasped.

I was excited to be in the exact area I’d seen in one of my favourite 007 movies back in Papua New Guinea.

Nene Country Park is along an impressive tree-lined avenue from Thorpe Wood, the headquarters of the Thomas Cook travel company - famous throughout the world.

Thomas Cook was a Leicester printer who came up with a great idea - he persuaded the newly formed Midland Railway to hire him a train.

He advertised a day out in the country at one shilling a ticket. When 570 people responded he knew he was on to something big and so Thomas Cook got into travel.
In 1874, he introduced the first traveller’s cheques which, before
the electronic age, became popular throughout the world as a safe
way of carrying currency.

As a man of Enga Province in PNG, I was amazed to learn how
such enterprising people started businesses to prosper to world
prominence.

Many Engans feel reluctant to start businesses in villages while
other emerging entrepreneurs move to urban areas where they
blossom in major business ventures.

The trouble in Enga is that business ventures can be burnt to the
ground during tribal feuds.

In 1984 my own small family trade store was completely destroyed
during a tribal war between my own and another clan of our
Ambarep tribe. Tragically, many people were also killed.

The police riot squads from Mt Hagen and Wabag moved in to
stop the fight but instead added to the destruction by shooting my
cattle dead, which were innocently grazing in the paddock.

After the police left, the warriors distributed the beef to all the
men who had defended the village. The iron roof from my store was
used as shields to deflect arrows fired by the enemy.

It was a hopeless situation for me. I could do nothing about it
from Wabag where I lived and worked.

And, even if I had gone home to stop the fight, could my lone
voice have been heard by hundreds of tribesmen shooting arrows at
each other? And what value did my trade store and heads of cattle
have compared to the 15 men killed on both sides?

The fight started after a village court magistrate hit an elderly man
on the head with a stick.

A court had convened to hear the case of some mata trees
belonging to the man who was hit on the head. The trees had been
cut down to build a new house by a man from another tribe living in
our village.

This fight could have easily been stopped but raged on and
claimed the 15 lives. Some fights in the province are equally stupid.
People die during arguments over marbles, possum traps and who
should play first at a snooker table.

How prosperous would Enga be if all the people lived in peace
and harmony, I asked myself that day in Peterborough.
Maybe one day they will realise that fighting is bad and learn to change their attitudes and resolve disputes though peaceful means and not resort to the stone-age practice of tribal warfare.

And, with these thoughts, I hopped on board the coach leaving behind the place where Thomas Cook had built a great business empire. Our next destination was Flag Fen, an ancient archaeological excavation site.

Dr Francis Pryor, the curator of the excavation site at Flag Fen in East Anglia wasted no time taking us on an extraordinary journey - one that catapulted me back into antiquity.

Three thousand years ago, on this very site, was a Bronze Age village situated around the water of a shallow lake. People living on a man-made island built their village using thousands upon thousands of pieces of wood.

Living in smoke-filled thatched houses, these people were the descendants of Stone Age hunters and gatherers who had gradually settled on the land - planting crops and domesticating animals.

As they crafted axes and other tools from bronze, so the transition to the Bronze Age was made. This was a time of tribal societies where individual warriors ruled supreme. It began shortly after 2,000BC, and ended around 600BC with the widespread adoption of iron tools and technology. Flag Fen belongs to the Bronze Age.

Dr Pryor explained how 10,000 years ago, because the weather was getting warmer, the water which had been locked in ice during the Ice Age began to melt. Very slowly, over thousands of years, the melting water flooded over lower ground, making shallow lakes.

At Flag Fen one group of people made an island of logs and sticks in the lake and built a village on it. These were the ruins which Dr Pryor was showing us.

Although there were lower, more convenient hill sites that could have been chosen, many people still preferred the really difficult and more defensive locations. But here there were no hills so the Flag Fen lake village was built in open water - perfect visibility for miles around.

We walked back to the visitor’s centre and viewed the photographs and some of the tools found in the ancient lake village. These included a wooden ladle, a small pot, a socketed axe, seeds, animal bones and others.
Human beings came to Sahul Land - a land mass which included New Guinea and Australia - before the end of the last Ice Age. They may have arrived by boat or bamboo raft across low swampy areas from the Philippines, needing to cross only 80 kilometres of water.

Human remains dated at around 45,000 years ago have been found on the Papua New Guinea coast while, in the Highlands, recent discoveries show people were there almost as long ago.

In his book *A Short History of PNG*, Dr John Dadeno Waiko noted that the first evidence of gardening came from the way in which the Highlands people established systems to manage water.

“In particular it is of interest how the swamps were drained to bring water to grow crops at Kuk near Mt Hagen in the Western Highlands about 9,000 years BP (before present),” Dr Waiko wrote. “If this evidence is accurate, it seems likely that these highland people were amongst the first gardeners in the world.”

If this is true, as many scholars believe, then we can rightly be puzzled about why the Highlands people didn’t advance to another Age?

What amazes me most was that I was born into a Stone Age society only about 40 years before I found myself at Flag Fen standing in modern clothes viewing this ancient site - evidence of a people who had managed to evolve to another Age.

My ancestors had lived in complete isolation only to be discovered and introduced to a new way of living quite recently by, at the time, a more advanced people.

The last 70 years has been a major and rapid transformation for us.
Lost and Found, Talking Space Travel at Cambridge University & My Neighbourhood Friends

Here was I from Papua New Guinea sitting in a coach with colleagues from 11 other countries on our way to Cambridge University, one of the oldest and most renowned educational institutions in the United Kingdom.

It was founded in 1209 and has 32 colleges. Of particular interest to we journalists was Magdalene College, where we headed straight for the Pepys Library to view archival material on the development of shorthand.

But I was not there to hear the Assistant Librarian give the briefing because, like any fool who strays from the main group, I was lost in the grounds of this ancient university with students from all over the world.

Some of these found me wandering perplexed through the narrow corridors and showed me the way to the Pepys Library. When I finally pushed through the door, sweating profusely that summer afternoon, the briefing had just ended.

After getting off the coach, the group had walked towards the library in one of the buildings. On the way I had stopped to extract my Olympus camera and take a picture of a particularly impressive edifice.

In the few seconds I was looking through the viewfinder, my colleagues had vanished down one of the countless corridors. To complicate the situation there were 12,000 students crowding all sorts of narrow passageways in a flow of constant movement.
At Cambridge, about one-third of the students are women and about 10% from 90 countries outside the UK. I didn’t have the time to find out whether there were any from PNG. What with all that getting lost.

In 1969, my primary school teacher told us about American astronaut Neil Armstrong, who was the first man to walk on the moon. The teacher showed us pictures from *Time* magazine of Armstrong on the lunar surface.

Nearly two decades later, I heard about him again along with Buzz Aldrin, Michael Collins and by then Senator John Glenn who were on a steering committee of the US government’s Columbus 500 Commission.

This commission accepted spacecraft designs from around the world that could race beyond the Moon to Mars to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus’ voyage to the Americas.

Cambridge Consultants Ltd (CCL), a global co-occupant of Cambridge Science Park, was the only UK-based company to put forward an entry.

CCL’s design looked like a huge manta ray and was described by planners as the most advanced technical design of all worldwide entries submitted. It was named *Nina*, after one of the ships in the Columbus fleet.

*Nina* was to be powered by solar energy alone on the trip to Mars.

A circular sail 250 meters in diameter, folded into a cylinder small enough to be stowed in a conventional rocket, was to be deployed after launch and power the spacecraft to Mars.

Chief designer of the spacecraft, Steve Temple, told us that one reason the team was successful was because CCL had such a wide variety of resources and technical expertise.

“They all contributed their knowledge to meet the many challenges the design posed,” he said.

The Science Park had been opened in 1975, the year PNG attained its independence.

I don’t know if that huge space sail made it to Mars but it was a pleasure for me to visit the place where the idea was hatched.

I had been lost and found and had some interesting chats. All had turned out well at the Cambridge University and during my brief stay in the United Kingdom.

What more could I ask for?
Immediately after I returned home from England towards the end of 1989, I planted over 2000 trees in my village of Kondo in Kandep. Having seen all the conservation efforts in the UK and after learning about the greenhouse effect that causes the climate to change, I felt I had to do something about it.

I encouraged people in my village to also plant trees. I told them how important it was to protect the environment and explained why the Highlands region was getting hot like in the coastal areas of PNG. Many villagers did listen to me and planted trees.

When you view my village from a distance now, it looks like a forest. People think all the trees are mine and give me credit for it. I intended for wild fowl, insects, birds and plants to make it their home.

But when the dreaded frost and severe droughts of August 2015 hit Kandep, most of my trees and flowering plants, numbering over 1000, were destroyed except pine trees which are frost resistant. I started replanting straight away as soon the rains came.

However, some very ignorant people from the village allowed their pigs to roam free under my forest. These prized animals destroyed the roots when they foraged for food like worms and grubs. During thunderstorms, some of these trees where the roots had been weakened by the pigs easily fell to the ground.

I rebuked these pig owners but they continued to let their pigs roam wild among my precious trees. They took advantage of the fact that I live in Wabag town, far from the village.

They didn’t seem to understand and appreciate my efforts when I explained to them how important it was to conserve the environment and allow the trees to grow big and tall. My message appeared to have fallen on deaf ears. Only proper education will change the mindset of all village people it seems.

Mt Kondo, from where my ancestors used to collect firewood and other bush materials to build their houses, was fast becoming denuded. The opossums that lived there have all disappeared as well as the yakale pep, a type of eagle that used to build its nest in the crevices of the steep rock face and over hangs.

I remember, Mt Kondo was the home to birds of paradise like the Miok or Princess Stephanie Austrapea bird of paradise, King of Saxony Bird of Paradise, Sickle Bill Bird of Paradise, the Ribbontail Astrapa bird of paradise and mountain parrots called Walin but they are no
longer there. Even cassowaries came to the mountain to feed but no more.

In fact my father had been named ‘Kumbon’ after the Ribbontail Astripa but the bird has disappeared from Mt Kondo. Only its name will live on through my family surname and photos if there are any.

The white limestone from under the surface of the mountain is beginning to appear. All the top soil will slowly be washed away and erode the surface as the ignorant villagers cut down the trees solely to make food gardens.

I lost my family trade store and cattle to tribal warfare and my village does not seem like the village I used to love. The people who live in the village now appear to be a different species of *Homo sapiens* altogether. They have different attitudes and seem to live for the present only.

I have now begun to love my other neighbours, who give me comfort and peace of mind. They provide me with sweet music like a children’s choir of angelic voices, physical beauty and playfulness. They just mind their own business and seem to enjoy life all day long in harmony with the environment.

They have always been there, living in my own backyard, in my house, everywhere.

I am of course talking about my pets and the birds, plants, trees and insects around me.

Some are pests that spread sickness. Others are very useful, like my dog which guards me at night and my cat, which has wiped out the rat population.

But until recently I never appreciated the existence of my neighbours - the birds and the insects. I thought nothing of killing them accidentally or destroying their habitat to make vegetable gardens. I sort of ignored them.

One afternoon, I spotted the feathers of one of the many small birds that come twice a day to feed on the sweet nectars of the flowers and trees growing around my house.

When I learned that one of the neighbourhood boys had killed the small bird with his slingshot I was truly upset.

I rebuked him and told him never to kill birds in the neighbourhood again. I reminded him it was not as big as a chicken that could feed a whole family and I pointed out my backyard was not his hunting ground.
Since then he has never tried to harm the birds, which came back to feed as usual. There is enough food around the house for them and there is no longer any danger. The birds can sense what I think.

There is a flowering plant next to my bedroom window and, at very close range, I can watch the birds feed. A small brown female bird and her red spotted male partner, of the species that was killed by the boy, always come and feed there.

But as soon as the male settles, the female always flies in and disturbs him from feeding on the bunches of hanging yellow flowers. Why she does that, I don’t know. Maybe jealousy; maybe part of a love game.

I have counted six different species of bird that frequent my backyard. They sing, feed and enjoy themselves all day until they disappear for the night.

One day I noticed a small greenish grey bird building a nest in the branches of the thickest yar tree near my house. I saw it fly away with three mature birds. I wish to see more species of birds come to my backyard and live permanently here.

And whenever I step into my abandoned vegetable garden left to fallow, I see all kinds of insects - including three or four different butterfly species, different kinds of spiders, grasshoppers, ants, bees and many more.

Most times you would forget they are there, but when you step into their habitat they scurry away in every direction. Some fly, some hop, some try to hide, some remain motionless.

When you look more closely you will notice all kinds of tiny little creatures crawling and creeping about. Of all the insects, though, ants are the busiest, never a moment to spare.

I have tried to take pictures of all my neighbourhood friends but some are too fast and escape the lens of my camera. Butterflies, spiders, grasshoppers and the common honey bee are my best models - they do not mind me taking their photos.

Sometimes I sit on a wooden bench in my backyard for many hours enjoying their company. The songs from the tiny birds and cacophony of insect sounds are sweet to my ears, the colours of the butterflies as they float past, spiders and multitudes of other creatures are beautiful to behold against the green grass and in the beautiful flowers.

It is pleasing indeed to see these children of nature enjoying a life
of freedom.

So walk out of the door, step into your backyard and see what I mean, unless of course, you live in an apartment in a high rise building.
In the United States of America

“A country that shows you everything, even its shadiest corners and does not see that you do not use your knowledge against her must be the strongest country in the world,” Czech Journalist, Michal Horacek, 1984, on a World Press Institute fellowship program.
A Call of Black Kinship

If President John Momis hadn’t given me the address of an American linguist who lived for many years in my province, I would never have seen Enga artefacts on display at the African American cultural centre at Wilberforce in Dayton, Ohio.

It was at Honolulu Airport late one night in June 1991 that I ran into John Momis and Michael Ogio, now Papua New Guinea’s Governor-General.

They were on their way to Canada to attend a conference on Indigenous People’s Rights focussing on the plight of American Indians and Australian Aborigines.

I was on an Alfred Friendly Press Fellowship program and on my way to Washington, DC where I would meet colleagues from a dozen other countries from around the world.

At the time of our meeting, Dr John Momis was PNG Minister for Provincial Affairs and Sir Michael Ogio was the member for North Bougainville.

I was glad to meet fellow citizens after an unpleasant incident with security. Of all the passengers flying in from Australia, I was singled out by a burly official who asked for my passport and detained me.

They released me later after checking me thoroughly. Maybe they thought I was from Iraq due to my skin complexion, long beard and Highlands cap. America was at war and security was tight.

I firmly grabbed Dr Momis’s hands as soon as I spotted him and spent an hour with the two leaders taking pictures, buying souvenirs and sharing soft drinks. Back home, I would have kept my distance but here it seemed I had known them for years.
When Dr Momis learned I was from Enga he asked, “Do you know Dr Paul Brennan?” “Not personally,” I said, “but I know he started the Enga Cultural Centre.”

“You might as well take his number with you, you never know,” Dr Momis said. “He is working here in Honolulu.”

I jotted the details on a small notepad and we said farewell as I left for Los Angeles and on to Washington.

From the air Los Angeles looked something like Port Moresby in the dry season - surrounded by barren rocky hills. On one side was the sea and on one hill to the left as we approached for landing was written the familiar word ‘Hollywood’ in giant white letters.

I did not have the time to explore the city but much later on another trip to Mexico in 2008, I was able to learn a little bit more about Los Angeles where movie stars found fame. And a movie super hero was the Governor of the state of California - Conan the Barbarian actor and seven times Mr Olympia, Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Papua New Guineans have also voted into office popular figures not on screen but on the radio like Sevese Morea who was speaker of Parliament, Raphael Doa, Kindi Lawi and many others and not forgetting Father of the Nation, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare.

The only person elected into office for fame both on radio and the movie screen was Francesca Semoso, who was elected during the 2nd Autonomous Region of Bougainville elections in 2015. She acted alongside Albert Toro in Tukana.

The lady who came to pick me up at the airport in Washington DC, Susan Talalay, asked me if I’d seen Rev Jesse Jackson, who was among the first passengers to pass through the gate.

I told her I had. “The reverend sat opposite me on the shuttle bus. I could have reached out and touched him.

“He recently visited Goroka, close to my province in Papua New Guinea,” I added.

Susan was not sure if Rev Jesse Jackson would run again in the US presidential election due the following year but that did not concern me. I was satisfied I’d seen this popular black man at close quarters.

Later, I also saw then Russian president Boris Yeltsin a few feet away when he came for a state visit to Washington DC. And talking of brushes with fame, back in 1989, I had seen Queen Elizabeth II at a London hospital where Her Majesty was on an official engagement.
It may seem absurd to mention sightings of world leaders but for me, coming from an isolated part of PNG and having read so much about these popular figures, seeing them live at close quarters were experiences I won’t forget - especially Rev Jesse Jackson.

He’d looked at me closely and our eyes met but we just couldn’t open our mouths to say something. His darting eyes sensed that he must have seen people like me somewhere. I am sure we could have talked but the distance from the plane to the terminal building was short. By the time I went for my luggage, he had disappeared.

The history of African Americans in the US is recorded and exhibited in the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Centre at Wilberforce near Dayton, Ohio.

African Americans recognise the museum as a national treasure - one that gives them deep meaning. One of the aims of the centre is to encourage an appreciation and understanding of the rich experiences of African Americans.

It serves as a national repository for objects, documents and other material of continuing historical and cultural merit, which reflects the traditions, values, social customs and experiences of African Americans.

And this is where Dr Paul Brennan steps in, the anthropologist John Momis referred me to in Honolulu. Dr Brennan was asked to organise an exhibition of PNG artefacts - most of them from Enga Province - and I had called him.

I later received a letter from Dr Brennan. I was blown away when it began in the Enga language with ‘Dear kaita miningi (friend) and ended with ‘emba auu pyoo katape, kaita miningi (stay well my friend).

The letter continued: “I was both surprised and thrilled to receive your telephone call last week, informing me of your presence in the US, and especially in the state in which I was born and spent my childhood.”

So we met and stayed in his brother David’s house in Dayton. We fluently used three languages to converse with each other - English, Tok Pisin and the Enga. One other person I conversed in the Enga language with was Cappa Yarka from Laiagam. He worked at the PNG Embassy at the United Nations in New York City.

Dr Brennan had spent his youth in Ohio and had earned four degrees. Eventually, and inspired by Malinowski’s earlier field work, refining his area of interest to Melanesia.
In 1968, Dr Brennan and his wife had been given the opportunity to work in Enga as staff linguist and anthropologist by the Lutheran Church, even though they were not Lutherans. They spent 10 of their 13 PNG years in Enga, conducting research, teaching the language and assisting in development projects.

“I recognised the need for establishing a museum and cultural centre,” he told me, “and began collecting material for that purpose.”

He also collected some artefacts for his own private collection, which I was going to see.

“It will be very satisfying to show someone from Enga-land the exhibit,” Dr Brennan said as we drove to the museum.

While much research remains to be done, enough evidence has been gathered to suggest that thousands of years ago during the last Pleistocene Age Papua New Guineans emerged after having crossed land bridges from Indochina. People have been living on the island of New Guinea for more than 25,000 years.

The exhibit attracted the attention of black Americans with the words: “Like some of you, we too are black. Like you, our roots are rich and deep. We are your distant cousins, sharing a common African heritage but now scattered in different parts of the world.”

“Maybe black Americans have appreciated the display more than others,” said Dr Brennan. “One little girl asked me if Engas see themselves as black people. I thought that was provoking. I told her, Engas are black.”

Even though it was not part of his job description, Dr Brennan continued to collect the artefacts of Enga and study their traditional lifestyle, though some of his colleagues rebuked him.

“Some missionaries suggested to me to forget about it because it’s heathenish,” he said.

“I didn’t think so. It had historical value. I had to think of them and their past. Who are they? Where did they come from? I never felt it was wasted effort.”

So Dr Brennan continued his research and collected as many artefacts as possible before the people burned them at the order of missionaries. The museum he built in Wabag houses one of the largest collections of stone axes in PNG. And he had taken some of the artefacts to America where they were now on display.
“How do you feel seeing artefacts from your country on display here? Do you feel them taken away from you?” Dr Brennan surprised me with the question.

“No, definitely not,” I replied. “I don’t feel that way at all. I feel proud. And I believe culture should be shared.”

This was a different kind of experience, something like a dream to have seen, smelled and touched some of the artefacts.

There were the rattling seeds the Engas used to contact the spirit world and the *Yupin* figure that I never knew existed. Dr Brennan had saved these precious items from destruction by ruthless missionaries.

His collection was probably the largest from the Central Highlands of PNG to be found anywhere in America or Europe. Included were objects once adored as gods, digging sticks shaped like paddles, stone axes and traditional attire like aprons and purpur.

There were also exotic paintings, decorated human skulls, carvings, tapa cloth and masks and other items of striking design from all over the country.

The most arresting were the traditional weapons of warfare: elaborately carved wooden shields with artwork patterned after the human form, human-bone tipped arrows and spears, killing axes and bows and arrows that could travel for 200 metres.

There were also images of people with battle wounds, people mourning over a fallen warrior and youths undergoing initiation ceremonies. Visitors asked Brennan about the significance of tribal warfare. He said fighting was deep-rooted in the culture.

Engas saw danger everywhere, he told people - in fast flowing rivers, the rugged terrain, ancestral spirits and much else - but the real enemies were the people who lived on the other side of the ridge or the river.

A clan had to defend itself when pigs were stolen, insults were shouted, boundaries were disputed and, especially, when blood was shed.

Brennan said the main function of Enga warfare was to ensure the territorial integrity of the clan and to enhance its prestige.

“As a precondition of fighting, clans must prepare for it in a variety of rituals,” he said. “Clan brothers will gather to discuss in secret any attitudes of disunity or transgressions against each other,
all aware that to enter battle without psychological unity could mean failure.”

Another ceremony, he told visitors, was designed to reveal traitorous intentions.

But in the midst of much change, many Engans did not seem interested in fighting. Even as Dr Brennan lived in Enga (1968-77), the transition from stone to steel had been rapid. And most people preferred Christianity ahead of ancestral worship.

Above all they wanted recognition as people of a growing country - and they appreciated the recognition of black people from other parts of the world.

The statement introducing the exhibition continued: “So, come wantok, brothers, speak of a common heritage. Look into our faces, see our creations. Know how we live. See us in our warfare, know us at peace…struggling like you to find stability, security. Come wantok, walk some trails with us.”
Lt Barney Nelson – My World War II Veteran & Generous Americans

When I met him in the United States, Barney Nelson, a jovial 72-year old, told me where his friends were killed in New Guinea.

Lt Barney Nelson was a veteran of the war in the Pacific - and he was to become my instant hero.

After all those years Barney still remembered two Melanesian Pidgin words - *kaikai* (food) and *meri* (woman).

He rang me quite unexpectedly one morning as I began to settle down to work at *The Plain Dealer*, a newspaper in Cleveland, Ohio. He was excited and fired questions at machine-gun pace.


“Now, wait a moment sir, how did you know my name?” I interrupted.

“In the paper. I saw an article about you coming here to Cleveland, so I wanted to see you.”

His words were music to my ears and, that evening, Barney picked me up for dinner at a restaurant near where I lived at Bosworth.

The minute he stepped out of his car he waved and smiled. He looked at me and we shook hands. He was astonished to see a person from a country he fought hard to defend. Equally astonished was I to meet a veteran of World War II.

Before I was born, Allied and Japanese war planes were seen chasing each other over the skies of Enga in the Highlands. Even
though the main fighting took place on the coast, bombs had been dropped on the Kandep lakes.

Some fell on Kyakau village. Some people tried to get scrap metal to make axes from an unexploded bomb. It blew up killing seven men and injuring several others. A big crater remains where the explosion occurred.

“Now, we’ll go have some kaikai,” Barney said with a radiant smile which never faded as we drove to Shooters, a waterfront restaurant where the Cuyahoga River empties into Lake Erie.

As we feasted on two huge Spanish pizzas, Barney brought out stacks of war photographs, charts, maps, books - everything on PNG. I was overwhelmed that this old man could remember so many places - and that he was still concerned about what was happening in my country so many decades later.

“I’m pleased to hear the splendid progress against the primitive situation I encountered in the 1940s,” Barney said. “I never expect to return to New Guinea but I see a lot of your country through you.”

He told me of his war experiences - the friends he lost in battle and the places he saw. I listened to him the way I listened to my father’s legends back home.

On 22 April 1944, Barney landed on the coast of Aitape and its jungles infested with mosquitoes, crocodiles and Japanese soldiers.

Having served as a lieutenant for only seven months, he had little experience in jungle warfare and wondered if he would ever see America again.

His company immediately engaged the enemy in a battle which lasted for 40 days in a series of small but bitter skirmishes.

“We killed many thousands of Japs,” Barney said. “Many times I could have been killed but I survived. I simply was lucky.”

The Allies had over 7,000 casualties in the battle at Aitape.

“I never feared death. Sadness became apparent only when some of my close friends were killed,” Barney said. “We had to fight on. It was a duty and finally we defeated Tojo and saved the islands.”

In Aitape, the assault in which Lt Barney Nelson participated included simultaneous landings at Biak and Hollandia. With the Australians holding Saidor, the Japanese forces were pinned in the jungles between Madang and Aitape.
“They were boxed in, completely cut off from Japan. They had nowhere to get food supplies. Most of them were starving,” Barney said.

“We would let them grow vegetables and stuff then, when the crops were ready for harvest, our planes would go in and - BOOM – their food was gone.”

The frustrated Japanese attempted to fight their way out on numerous occasions but were always repelled with heavy losses.

On the night of 10 July 1944 several thousand Japanese infantry broke through US lines defending the Drinumor River. For the next month, US troops were locked in a battle of attrition with the Japanese. The Americans fought hard to restore the broken line and destroy the Japanese.

Barney said the campaigns in New Guinea were among the best kept secrets of the war. It was only in 1984 that an insight into the fight at Aitape was revealed by Dr Edward Drea of the Combat Studies Institute in Kansas.

Barney said New Guinean policeman, known then as ‘polisbois’ contributed much to the allied success. They scouted for the Allies and fought alongside them.

“They would go into the jungles, look for Japanese positions and tell us their strengths and weaknesses. Then they would go straight back in and fight alongside us. They were fearless,” he said.

Lt Barney Nelson married after the war and he had a son, who sadly died. He also had two daughters - Barbara, a professor in political science at the University of Minnesota, and Beverly, a teacher in Michigan.

His wife Rachael had retired as director of the Cleveland Heights Public Library.

Barney entered the restaurant business soon after the war ended. His business expanded and over the years he owned or sold 11 restaurants in Cleveland and by 1961, he started a consultancy firm.

“The worst thing a person can do is to stop working,” he told me. “I will retire when I can’t move around anymore.”

Barney showed me two pictures - one of Lt John Dorigan and himself and the other of Captain Bottcher and Lt Dorigan - all smiling and taken at the same spot under a coconut tree at an Aitape beach on 9 September 1944.
Nelson lost both friends in the Philippines - Capt Bottcher in December 1944 and Lt Dorigan in March 1945.
Barney still mourned their deaths and wondered why a man should be killed when the war was just about to end.

Captain Herman Bottcher was killed on Leyte Island during the Ormoc campaigns in the Philippines. Bottcher was not yet a US citizen at the time of his death.

“I have tried to live as a good American and I want to die as one,” Bottcher had said in 1942 when he was hailed as a hero in the New Guinea campaign. He got his wish in a burst of mortar fire while his company was holding off 300 Japanese.

By that time Congress had naturalised him by a special act so Bottcher could be commissioned. He already had the DSC, The Leaf Cluster and the Purple Heart with two clusters. At the time of his death, recommendations were in for a promotion to major and for a Silver Star.

Capt. Bottcher was a professional soldier. He had fought with the Spanish Loyalists in seven battles in 25 months. He was wounded twice and decorated three times. That was in 1936.

During World War II Bottcher turned out to be a terrific jungle fighter. He knocked out enemy machine gun nests single-handed, slaughtered Japs by the half squad and rescued wounded comrades with utter disregard for his own safety.

When all ranking officers were knocked out, Bottcher took command of his company and drove a wedge to the sea between two Jap groups at Buna village and Buna Mission. He held this dangerous position for a week until the battle was won.

At Aitape, Bottcher led a reconnaissance troop behind enemy lines for 57 days and penetrated 36 miles into enemy territory. The men learned to trust blindly their tall, raw-boned captain with a thick German accent.

One soldier said: “I never feel safer out in the jungle than when I’m with Capt Bottcher.”

He was known for his reconnaissance patrols throughout the campaigns in New Guinea and the Philippines. Although he was ferocious in combat, he was no brute. He treated prisoners well and regarded them as humans only fighting at the command of others. One captured Japanese described him as a ‘fine gentleman.’

On December 30, 1944 Bottcher’s unit was instructed by radio to
return to division headquarters since the Leyte campaign was virtually concluded. No Japs had been seen for several days.

But at 0235 hours on December 31, the 90 men of Bottcher’s outfit were awakened by heavy fire from rifles, machine guns, knee mortars and 90-mm mortars.

It was later learnt that 300 Japs, trying to fight their way to the sea in the hope of being evacuated safely by boat from the island, had run across Bottcher and his men.

When Bottcher got hit, he was about four feet from the radio operator who was setting up his radio to advise headquarters. There was an explosion and Bottcher called out: “They blew my leg off.”

A lieutenant twisted a tourniquet on the captain’s thigh as a medic gave the CO a shot of morphine. Another medic raced for blood plasma stored in a shack but found the shack and the medical supplies destroyed by gunfire.

Bottcher knew he would not make it and ordered the troops to leave him behind and withdraw. They withdrew but, of course, they carried the captain with them. They made it to their main infantry lines just before dawn. A radio call had been sent for plasma but by the time it arrived, Bottcher was unconscious.

The medic kept up a frantic radio conversation with the station hospital, describing Bottcher’s condition and receiving doctor’s directions for treatment. But Bottcher’s pulse weakened. About 0600 hours no sign of life could be detected.

His men said later they couldn’t believe their captain could be killed by the Japs. They didn’t talk much about it. They just sat around and stared wearily at the constant drizzle of Leyte.

Bottcher had no wife or parents. All he had was an aunt in San Francisco and lots of friends in the army.

Apart from Lt Barney Nelson and Dr Paul Brennan, Americans who were familiar with PNG became my best friends. They were very kind, receptive and understood me thoroughly. They showed me everything about American life - culture, food, politics and history.

I appreciated very much their kindness when they treated me as if they were responsible for my welfare on my study trip to their great country.

David Minich and his family helped me find a house so I could settle down comfortably in the first few weeks of my stay in the city of Cleveland. The Minich family were with Habitat for Humanity
building houses for villagers at Kusap in Lae in 1987 till 1990. They invited me to their home, which was decorated with PNG carvings.

On one memorable weekend, they drove me to a campout on David’s brother’s countryside property in the state of New York. We fished in the private lake, paddled a boat in it and camped on the shore. We made a big bonfire, sat around it and cooked marshmallows under the stars. We retired for the night in our own little tents.

David’s four sons, each had a PNG Highlands cap and the two girls had bilums. They all spoke Melanesian Pidgin and I felt very much at home.

Then there was Joe Daprano, a medical student at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. He had been a Peace Corps Volunteer health worker in the West Sepik province.

Daprano invited me to his home where I met his family. His mum treated me to a memorable Italian dinner one evening. I particularly enjoyed the red wine after the heavy meal consisting a lot of meat.

Eric, one of Joe’s friends also a medical student lent me his second bicycle for the length of my stay in Cleveland. I peddled it to many parts of the city in the cool summer evenings. But I avoided the multi-lane super highways, which were always full of cars.

From the Baptist Church congregation where the Minich family attended church service came pots and pans, cutlery, clothes hangers and even a radio set for my use in my new apartment.

A good many staff at the Plain Dealer took me to lunches and dinners and drove me to places of interest. When I went to West Virginia, Managing Editor of the Charleston Daily Mail, Mr James C Smith pushed a $50 bill into my pockets even when I refused.

I discovered that the generosity of these American people was something like Papua New Guineans. In the Highlands visitors were customarily treated in a manner similar to the way I was being treated in the US.

We children were instructed to treat visitors well: “Give food and fetch water for them. Then provide them with a comfortable bed. Do not talk nonsense in the presence of visitors. Treat them well and the same will be done to you. Remember to listen carefully and understand what the other person is saying before you reply. Do not just utter any word that comes to your mouth but think first and speak.”
In America, a ‘no’ meant a ‘yes’ and vice versa because when I refused to accept something they always asked me: “Are you sure?”

Americans also knew how to talk in the same way Engas speak; the ‘you don’t shoot all your arrows at once, hold some back’ concept of speech and conversation.

When I was in Dayton to view the Exhibition of Enga artefacts, Dr Paul Brennan’s brother David and his wife Janet asked me what food I liked best in America.

I mentioned that when I attended St Paul’s Lutheran High School back in Enga Province, I used to overhear my American teachers talk about something called a pizza which I never saw or tasted. So the first thing I did when I arrived in Washington DC was order pizza in a restaurant.

That night it was pizza for dinner in the Brennan home. They had indirectly wanted to know what food to cook that I would like for dinner that night. My pizza was served on a special plate that was usually used by special guests to their home.

As a parting gift David and Janet gave me a new book that had just been published - *Wisdom Seeker* which I still keep to this day.
Flight of the Jews & Thomas Alva Edison the Boy with the Addled Mind

America to me was as culturally diverse as PNG. The streets of New York were very much like Port Moresby. I saw different nationalities from all over the world talking in their own languages and some even wearing their own traditional *bilas*. I even found people who could not utter a single English word.

America is, in fact, made up of immigrants from all over the world. It was a pity, I never met any original landowners, the American Indians I usually saw in cowboy movies screened at St Paul’s Lutheran High School back in PNG. Most people I had contact with were Europeans, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics and Africans.

In the 1800s - 1900s waves of immigrants from all over the world went to America. They were Poles, Irish, Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, English, Scots, Slovenians, Serbians, Croatians, Hungarians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Russians, Lithuanians, Greeks, Hispanics, Ukrainians and people from dozens of other countries.

Many went to Cleveland, Ohio. They were a very strong people, willing to work hard in Cleveland’s steel mills, petroleum refineries, coach factories, lumber yards and on its canal boats.

The immigrants had thought they were going to a land of gold-paved streets but spent their lives working a dozen hours a day, six days a week for low wages, often in unsafe conditions.

At the time new arrivals could easily be spotted. Women from Russia, Poland and other Eastern countries were seen wearing babushkas and men dressed in coarse woollen trousers, black high
top boots and shirts with colourful embroidery.

Many immigrants who had gone to America a generation or two earlier were fearful of the influx of the new arrivals whom they considered exotic people.

But eventually most accepted the opinion of the American philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson who wrote in 1823: “A nation, like a tree, does not thrive well till it is engrafted with a foreign stock.”

The reasons for migration to America were the same for all nationalities. They wanted jobs, freedom to own a home, buy a piece of land and start businesses.

My World War II hero, Barney Nelson, was a descendent of Jewish immigrants. I was overcome with emotion when he told me why his people had migrated to America.

“They came here for safety, security and a place where they could fear no one,” Barney said with a distant look on his cheerful face. “America was a place to feel safe.”

Barney was glad to hear PNG enjoys much freedom: “I envy your country’s freedom. Keep it that way - some peoples of the world these days do not feel safe at all. They are insecure. I am sure your government is aware of what’s happening in Cuba, South Africa, Northern Ireland - people are fighting for recognition, safety and freedom.”

I told Barney PNG had never faced any major threat to its internal security, except the Bougainville crisis which I was sure would be resolved peacefully.

“The Jewish people have been persecuted for hundreds of years. They were killed ..oh ..by the thousands in czarist pogroms and then by the millions in the Holocaust. Can you believe people dying like flies?” Barney asked.

I just nodded my head.

“The figures are staggering but it is true. They died in the millions. Human souls just wiped off the face of the earth,” Barney said. “Until Israel’s creation, there was virtually no place on earth - aside from America where Jews were safe.”

America was where the Jewish immigrants as a people could do what they wanted, live where they wanted to and do things as they wished which were not dictated to them by their neighbours or by dictatorships.
“You must go to Israel and find out how the country survives surrounded by its enemies,” Barney said. “Oho! How I wish for you to go and see their Kibbutz's and see how self-reliant they are.”

“I wish I could go there and see those things,” I said. “My government has established diplomatic relations with Israel. And Israelis have been coming to PNG to share their technical skills. Four bee experts have already come to my province to train and show agricultural officers how to produce honey.”

At one time, a student from the Cleveland State University asked me: “What things in America have you found, you did not expect to see here?”

I said I was impressed with American politics and history - how people from all over the world have built America to become the world power that it is today - and how they have made it a safe haven for people, especially Jews, to enjoy life in total freedom.

Something else I noticed I told the student was that I expected to see a lot of young people going to church. But the churches were like those at home where most of the congregation were elderly people.

It appeared to me, the attitude of young people towards the church appeared to be the same. But the churches are sanctuaries where they could seek love, peace and happiness and seek refuge from a violent world.

From my grandfather’s first wife, four children were born - two boys and two girls. One of the boys was my father. The other boy, whose name was Peruwa, was killed in tribal warfare and whose spirit, the magician found out made me sick and a poor pig had to be slaughtered as a sacrifice.

My grandfather’s second wife brought uncle Ene into the world. He married Paula, whose brother Imaipi Apai was not present during the bride price distribution. He was working on a copra plantation on the coast. When he came home, Paula and I went to see him at Kanawaingi village.

A red box he had brought back attracted my attention. He placed a circular disc on a circular surface and wound a handle on the side of the box. Music started to play. I was left in awe.

Later at Pausa High School, our English teacher, Joan Everingham, an Australian, encouraged us to read a book about the life of one of the world’s greatest inventors - Thomas Alva Edison. I
found from the book that the name of the red box that played the music was a ‘phonograph’. Edison had invented it.

When I was in America, I heard that Edison’s birthplace was in Milan, a small town near Cleveland, Ohio. I wanted to visit it. Lt Barney Nelson, my friend, the World War II veteran, offered to drive me there.

We entered a neat town and parked the car in the public square in front of a statue of a woman and a boy. It was young Thomas Edison and his influential mother Nancy.

We viewed the figures a while and then drove past galleries and antique shops and along tree-lined avenues with attractive old homes. We came to a little red brick building with an old tree alongside it.

This was a cherry tree, now bare of its leaves in the autumn. It was planted about the time Edison was born. And the little brick house was the birthplace of one of history’s most famous inventors. It’s now the Edison Birthplace Museum.

The first thing I did was take a lot of pictures of this charming cottage, where on a cold day, 11 February 1847, Thomas Alva Edison was born. The main door still had the iron knocker placed there by Samuel Edison, Tom’s father.

An elderly lady, who was the curator, patiently showed us the displays - an incandescent lamp, an early model phonograph, Edison’s father’s hat, cane and great coat resting on his favourite chair.

As I entered the bedroom where Thomas Edison was born, I was almost certain I heard a baby crying. Having left behind a two month old son of my own, I was moved with awe. Leaving the bedroom, I walked to the lobby and bought three books on the life of the famous inventor.

Outside, we looked around an old canal and walked through the neighbourhood. Thomas Edison’s story intrigued me particularly because he never went to school.

But his life was consumed by a passion for self-education and the number of his patents, 1,100, far exceed that of any other inventor.

He invented more than the phonograph. Try the motion picture, electric motor, alkaline storage battery, light bulb and so many more important contributions to people’s lives.

One US President described him as a ‘rare genius’ but he didn’t act like one. His clothes were always untidy and dirty, his hair tousled
and he rarely found time to shave. But he did more than any other man to influence the industrial civilisation in which we live.

Edison was a good example of what a person can do with imagination and total commitment to the project.

Sometimes Edison found himself rich and at other times as poor as a man can be. But he never lost hope in himself and simply worked harder to accomplish what he believed he could do with his own two hands.

The subjects taught at schools in the US in Edison’s time were the old regulars, reading, writing and arithmetic. The stick was freely used to beat slow or naughty children. Edison was one of these. Eventually his teacher reported to an inspector, “That boy is addled and is not worth keeping in the school any longer.”

Overhearing this, Thomas complained to his mother, Nancy, who was filled with rage and confronted the teacher.

“You don’t know what you are talking about and the real trouble is that my boy has more brains than you. I will take him home and teach him myself. I will show you what can be done with him.”

And so his mother never let him go to school again but taught him everything she knew at home.

With many thoughts in my mind, I left the little red brick building. Its humble size and simple design serves as a constant reminder that in America, Papua New Guinea, and elsewhere in the world, a humble beginning does not prevent the rise to success.
Evil Music. Action Movies. Tribal Warfare & Cultures of Violent Death

Thomas Edison invented the phonograph with good intentions for people to enjoy good music. And Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone for easy communication.

But in the modern era, with all the advances in technology and knowledge, society has abused these milestone creations to gratify the desires of the flesh. Filth is transmitted through the airwaves.

A friend of mine took me to a night club in Akron, a lively town near the city of Cleveland in America. A crowd of young people was dancing to American rock music.

One of the songs included a newly released rap song about a serial killer named Jeffery Dahmer. He shocked America and the world when he confessed to killing and dismembering 17 young men.

Dahmer also confessed to sexually abusing some of the corpses. He was sentenced to consecutive life sentences for 15 of the murders. My friend encouraged me to dance. But I could not. The disgusting lyrics resonating in the room and in my mind were too much to bear, even after a few Canadian Molsons.

Perhaps I was biased, since, in my own Enga Province, people continued to fight and kill each other over the pettiest arguments. How could I blame others when a man from the Upper Lagaip area of Laiagam killed his own blood brother over a pig given at a compensation payout?

And how about the brutal murder of an innocent woman and mother of two small children, also in Laiagam, her head severed by a single swing of a bush knife? The man who killed her thought she...
was his own wife in the company of another man at a market place in twilight.

In another incident, two men from Laguni in Kandep district were sentenced to 20 years imprisonment for killing their relative during an argument over a single pandanus nut tree.

The National Court judge told the two men before sentencing: “None of your clan gave evidence as to who did the killing.... Until you all stop fighting, we cannot get proper development in Papua New Guinea because we waste so much money on police, courts and fixing things up which you destroy.

“It takes many years for a man to grow, yet you kill him in one minute. You are not a big man by fighting. In Papua New Guinea today, big men keep law and order, run businesses, grow coffee and solve problems by talking things through. If you don’t want to, we will send you to jail for many years.”

At one stage, the judge declared the law and order situation in Enga to be out of control. He became tougher.

Kungus Kot was sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty of murder. “This was a deliberately planned attack with axes and bows and arrows on the deceased who was working in his garden,” the judge said. “This type of tribal conflict killing is continuing to play havoc with the development of this part of the country and is preventing all attempts to have a peaceful and orderly society.”

In the United States, I witnessed hideous crimes reported in the powerful press. And people continued to kill each other in PNG.

I began to question what more was needed to be done to wipe out serious crime altogether in America, PNG and elsewhere in the world.

I ordered a couple more Canadian Molsons and tried to drown out my thoughts as my friend kept dancing,

And serious crime continued to be committed. Back in PNG a foreign woman and her daughter were raped in their Port Moresby home. For a young country with a population of just about 4 million at the time, such vicious attacks on women in their own homes portrayed a bad image for PNG. But I realized that such serious crime was universal.

The United States set a new record for murders in 1991 with an estimated 23,700 people losing their lives to violence - that was 260
people more than the 1990 deaths.

Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr. whose Judiciary Committee majority staff compiled the report blamed the record carnage on drugs, deadly weapons and teenage gang related violence.

And violent movies was one obvious contributing factor. One hit movie *Boyz N the Hood* left a trail of death and destruction of hundreds of dollars-worth of property following screening of the film.

A 23 year old man was shot dead in Chicago and 33 people were injured nationwide following the screening of the film.

But the message in *Boyz N the Hood* was really about growing up black in South-Central Los Angeles and pleading with young people not to get involved in drugs and gang warfare and kill each other.

If anything, the message in the movie was lost. While watching a scene when Ice Cube’s character, Doughboy, goes on a revenge spree, “Shoot that....” several movie goers shouted in a theatre as Doughboy stood gun in hand watching a wounded street warrior crawling through his own blood to get away.

When Doughboy finally blasted the man the audience cheered. The scene seemed real so everybody should have been silent or in tears. But who can blame young audiences these days. In PNG, people are killed and families break-up following State of Origin matches!

The real-life scenes were captivating everyone who seemed to enjoy the violence. Two other movies, *Godfather III* and *Colours* were also accompanied by violence as soon as they were released.

Young people interpreted the movies in their own ways thus the wanton shooting deaths, injuries and destruction of property. Even anti-rape movies were interpreted by people as promoting it.

“The very manner in which sexual scenes were shot cause rape to look like an activity that is energising,” said playwright Steve Tesich

Americans were alarmed at the rate at which violence had gripped society and how this influenced youth in real life.

University of Illinois Psychologists, Leonard Eron and L Rowell Hausmann studied one set of children for more than 20 years. They found that kids who consistently watched TV violence at the age of 8 were more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child abuse at age 30.

They said heavy exposure to television violence was one of the
causes of aggressive behaviour, crime and violence in society.

“It cannot be denied or explained away,” they said. “If we don’t do something, we are contributing to a society that will be more and more violent,” they said.

But movie makers do not seem to heed to these warnings. Big violent movies continue to be produced and make big money. In fact the entertainment industry is one of the biggest multi-million dollar industries in America.

With a population of over 250 million people America absorbs crime and contain it easily. A well trained police force is always on the alert, ever ready to quash any sort of disturbance that threatens daily life.

But for a young country like PNG, which struggled to fit comfortably into the modern world, it can do without action films. But with the advance in modern technology - the internet, CDs, digital cameras and laptops - the situation seems uncontrollable indeed.

Good leadership at all levels of society is what PNG will always need to steer the country in the right direction.
Photographs
My parents in 1975 with their first granddaughter - the first born child of my sister Clara.

My brothers (kneeling) and two other village boys - how they were dressed in 1977. They were all attending primary school. I must have looked like this as a child too.
Uncle Wariak and a cousin with Mt Kondo in our village in 1975 after he had returned from Bougainville working on a cocoa plantation

Kandep Patrol Post in the 1960s
Kandep Primary School in the early 1960s. Moira Warr taught me in Grade 5 in the long building at the rear.

Parents always came to work at the Kandep Primary School in the 1960s – 70s.
Jim Fenten and his late wife, Fayre, during the establishment of the Kandep Patrol Post in the 1960s

Fr Gerald J Theis, SVD on his motorbike in front of his house
Men from Kandep working on the Kandep to Laiagam Road in the early 1960s

Pilipolo Oko and some family members watch as their village is levelled out for ever to make way for the Porgera Mine. His village of Painadak fell within the Special Mining Lease (SML) area. He had to give it up to the Porgera Joint Venture - the mine developers.
Moira and Lloyd Warr in 2015. Moira was my Grade 5 teacher in 1971.

At UPNG - with my journalism lecturers David Ingram and late Peter Henshall and colleagues in 1985. Two of my colleagues were from Vanuatu and Solomon Islands.
Inside a lecture room at the Thomson Foundation in Cardiff in Wales in 1989. I was introduced to word processors for the first time there.

Lason Watai and his family in Cardiff in 1989
With a colleague at the Caphilly Castle ruins – Cardiff in 1989

England – with the late Archie Markham in his house in Highgate, London in 1989
Val Williams and Patsy Robertson with me after I had presented them with Highland caps for their help in attending the Thomson Foundation

In the USA – me and my colleagues of the AFPF Fellows in 1991
In the USA - me in front of the Reflecting Pool in Washington DC

In the USA – me on a boat in front of the Statue of Liberty in New York
In the USA – Lt Barney Nelson when we first met having lunch at The Shooters in the Flats in Cleveland, Ohio

In Mexico City – me halfway up the Pyramid of the Moon. In the background is the Pyramid of the Sun and the courtyards at Teotihuacan
Clashing with Western Culture Head on & Population Explosion

One evening in Cleveland, Ohio, two friends suggested we go for drinks at a bar often frequented by nurses.

I was a bit scared I might end up talking with the wrong woman. I didn’t want a husband, live-in boyfriend or fiancée to catch me talking with their beloved.

And I couldn’t stand it when a woman looked me in the eyes as we talked. I was not used to women looking at men directly like that.

If she was a relative, yes, you can talk with direct eye contact. But it was uncomfortable talking with strange women.

In America, it seemed there was no distinction between a married woman and a single woman. They all dressed alike.

Married women in Papua New Guinea were expected to dress and act a little differently. And when they talk, they look away in a passive manner. They don’t look at men directly.

On the other hand, having come from PNG, which expects girls to marry sometimes as young as 16 or 17, I could not believe that so many attractive young African American women were still single.

“Why is this so?” I asked my friend.

“Because a lot of black men of marriageable age are behind bars,” he said. Was he joking?

“Also some of the women do not want to get married. They earn their own keep and want to enjoy life on their own.”

According to an American study, marriage was often the only route to economic security for women 40 years ago but that’s no longer the case.
In fact, men and women told researchers that one of the reasons men want to get married is because the guys are looking to sponge off their women.

In traditional PNG society girls were expected to marry so the bride price would enrich their relatives. Bride price was recognised as fulfilling the girl’s obligation. Relatives became worried when a girl failed to get marriage proposals from a suitor.

The older women would prepare young girls to establish a good name for themselves as they started families among different people in their husband’s homeland.

“Clean your ears and listen to your husband and obey his instructions,” they would say. “Do not look down on him, even if he is old, has a short nose or is poor.

“Once he has paid the bride price, you are his wife. He is your husband for life. Work hard for him, bear his children and raise his children.”

The girls were warned that if they did not perform their duties, they would likely be beaten by their husbands. If they committed a serious offence, like adultery, they would be tortured.

They were also advised to refuse a marriage proposal if they did not like a man before the bride price was distributed. It would be too late after the warapae pigs were killed to conclude marriage proceedings.

At the time when explorers began to infiltrate Enga Province in the late 1930s, a married woman from my village was caught committing adultery. She was told to strip in front of the whole village in the public square where the tee or moka exchange took place.

Her lover was also ordered by tribal chiefs to strip and perform in public what they’d done in secret. The woman’s fingernails were then burnt slowly until she promised never to commit adultery again.

This was jungle justice approved by society. These forms of punishment were cruel. But people accepted them as necessary to contain people within the confines of established mores.

Traditional taboos were always observed. And the tough punishments ensured stability in the family.

There were few spoilt children, not many broken marriages and, once a woman was married, she remained so for the rest of her life. Not many people lived single lives or suffered in isolation. There was
always a wantok with whom to share food or who would provide consolation. Serious crimes like gang rape and adultery were rare.

But I thought this trend would change. PNG girls would refuse to marry. They would live in their own apartments, drive their own cars, choose their own soul mate and set the time to get married. I was concerned there would be an increase in domestic violence.

In the United States, I met a young woman from a developing country. Every time I tried to share my problems with her, she joked about them. She laughed when she saw my messy apartment. Worst of all, she called me a male chauvinist pig - a title I don’t think I deserved.

“What is the position of women in your country? Don’t they do much of the domestic work,” I asked her.


“Take it easy. You shouldn’t stereotype all men,” I said.

The patriarchal society I was accustomed to expected women to be submissive and respect men at all times. In America the position of women was different. They stood on an equal pedestal.

But my argument with the lady from the third world helped me to understand the reality of the changing status of women everywhere.

In my view, even in a changing society, married women in PNG would still be expected to dress and act differently from single women. National women who wore a lot of perfume were often rebuked as ‘smelling like a chemist.’

From a western standpoint, this behaviour may seem odd. But, as it was, the situation in PNG was interesting for both men and women as traditional teachings and western influence merged.

And, inevitably, there was change. Not always for the better.

As my African-American friend from Cleveland drove me home after the night-out at the bar frequented by the nurses, he was fascinated to hear about the practise of polygamy in Papua New Guinea and how a man was able to keep all his wives under the one roof and expect them to remain faithful to him.

He was blown away when I told him I had two wives.

“How do you know they will be faithful to you, all this time you will be here in the States?” he asked. “How do you fulfil their needs
and wants? I mean, you know, are they not jealous? I am sorry if I offend you but these are immediate questions that come to mind.”

“I am not offended,” I said. “There are many reasons why a man marries multiple wives. One of my relatives - our first Member of Parliament, Nenk Pasul MBE - married seven wives.”

Our big men often married many wives to expand their influence, gain power and prestige and to establish their positions in society.

“But you don’t get a woman free,” I said. “You know it costs something. You have to pay bride price for a maiden’s hand. Not in the sense of purchasing commodities at a supermarket but as a sign of goodwill and opportunity to display your wealth and give with generosity.”

Family ties were strengthened and every tribal group interlocked like a chain with every member in a tribe regarded as a brother or sister.

“Back home while I am away,” I said, “I expect my brothers to protect my property, wives, and children. I expect them to give them firewood, food and watch out for their general welfare.”

Adultery was out of the question. If a woman was found out, she would certainly be punished. Her very act would disgrace the family and the clan. I told my friend about the humiliation suffered by the adulterous couples in my village. Some women had their noses cut off.

“Does a man have to beat his wife every time she does something wrong?” my friend asked me.

“No, a man has to be careful. A woman does not hang on a tree like fruit for the picking. She is paid something and the bridal wealth given is not all his. People may not contribute a second time if she runs away to her village or commits suicide after being maltreated.”

All men are born of a woman. They are expected to look after their wives as they would want their own kin to be treated - with love and respect.

“When a loved one dies, some men and women cut their fingers or ears off in my area,” I told my friend. “And in olden times the women used to smear white clay on their bodies and wear heavy necklaces made of Job’s tears for months on end. Now, women wear black skirts and blouses as a sign of love and true grief.”

“Can I believe that?” my bemused friend exclaimed.
The same subject popped up another evening, this time in the company of two African American female journalists with whom we were having dinner at a restaurant.

One of the girls asked me if I was married.

“Let’s not discuss such matters. We are people from worlds apart. Let us just enjoy the moment and live for it,” I protested.

“We agree, yes, but we want to let you know we are both single,” they said. “Will it hurt to tell us a bit about yourself?”

I knew where they were coming from. They wanted to tease me and provoke me to talk.

“Well, OK. But if I say I am not married you will think I am trying to woo you. And if I tell you I am married you won’t believe me either because I have two wives.”

“Oh really? Stop pulling our legs.”

“No, but it’s true,” I interjected. “The person talking to you and sitting opposite is truly married. He has two wives.”

The girls laughed and laughed and I feared they might not stop. People were casting curious glances.

They remarked how greedy I was. I was one against two. But I didn’t feel any embarrassment. I was not joking either nor was I trying to woo them. We were mature people talking about adult matters.

They had reason to laugh. They could not possibly imagine a man having two wives or more living in the same house. The society they were brought up in was different.

“No, it’s not greed. The reason is not sexual gratification. It’s more than that. If one of you became the second or third wife of a man from my country, you would understand what I mean and find yourselves easily coping,” I said.

“Oh yeah? Oh yeah?” they said in chorus and the laughter broke out again.

I kept on talking.

“Does the man sleep with all his wives on the one bed every night?” one of them asked.

“No, there are many rooms in the house. Each wife has her own room. But things are changing. Due to western influence traditional society is breaking down.”
Rivalries between wives has crept into families; some wives have even been killed. First wives by the second wife or vicer versa. There is talk laws might be introduced to ban polygamy.

There were no control measures. Men traditionally stayed away from their wives in a hausman - a house especially for men - but now men and wives lived together. There were unnecessary childbirths.

With the introduction of liquor, some men got drunk and apparently gave no second thought to the consequences.

The two girls were listening attentively, throwing in questions from time to time. It dawned on me that our conversation, which started as a sort of joke, had turned out to be about something frightening - population explosion.

We agreed this was a global problem. It did not matter anymore that we were from different backgrounds, ideologies and ways of life. We were all part of a world community - the population was growing very rapidly and threatening all of us.

In the 1970s I learnt in school that the population of PNG was just over two million but growing at about 2.5% a year. Now the population stood at nearly 8 million.

The government must not fail to understand that great social and economic problems will result from over population.

Again, I felt education would be the key. A literate person will understand how important it was to plan families and provide quality life for each and every member of the family unit to enjoy.
Democracy or Not to Be – Lessons From an African Experience

The unprecedented referral of some Papua New Guinean elected leaders to the Leadership Tribunal and the defiant manner in which some senior ministers have opposed the Ombudsman Commission prompts me to share an experience I had with some Africans at a convention in Kansas City.

It’s not new to see leaders referred and charged with leadership breaches but in the past they never spoke so openly against a revered state institution like the Ombudsman Commission, even after some of them were found guilty and punished.

I am from Enga Province and the first Enga politician to be referred to the Tribunal was Kompiam-Ambum MP, Tom Amaiu. He simply resigned from public office to avoid the humiliation of appearing.

Then Jeffery Balakau was found guilty and dismissed from office. He didn’t complain. Later Governor Peter Ipatas was fined K1,000 each on 16 charges on which he was found guilty. His supporters contributed the money to pay the penalty on the spot.

But, during the current term of Parliament, many leaders who have been referred criticised the Ombudsman Commission and even called for it to be abolished. State Investment Minister Ben Micah called his referral ‘stupid’, argued with Chief Ombudsman Rigo Lua, and refused to sign the referral documents.

He may have been fighting for his rights but what message did his behaviour portray to the masses?

While we ponder this question let me share an experience I had with some Africans at a convention of the National Association of
Black Journalists (NABJ) in the United States many years ago; an experience in which I was fascinated as the Africans argued about democracy.

I was proud to be in Kansas City as a person from a democracy on a par with America and other democracies which ensure their citizens enjoy individual freedoms and rights – civil, social, political and cultural - guaranteed by law.

I was there when our Papua New Guinea economy was strong and the kina was equal to the US dollar. By then, independent for just 16 years, PNG was a vibrant young country.

I was invited to attend the convention with three colleagues from Africa by the NABJ, an organisation of African-American journalists, students and media professionals.

It may not have been the right forum to argue about democracy but a debate was started by one of the Africans at one of the plenary sessions which intended to discuss positive changes taking place on the African continent.

“Many Americans do not know anything about the rest of the world,” asserted a man from Liberia.

He said it wasn’t right for four people on the panel – two African-Americans, a Nigerian and a Tanzanian - to discuss the subject, *The Changing Face of Africa*, at such a small workshop.

“Africa is not a village,” the Liberian began. “What do these four people know about Africa - a continent with 52 countries? It shows how ignorant Americans really are.”

The two African-Americans were journalists covering South Africa for two major newspapers in the United States. The Nigerian and the Tanzanian were my colleagues on the 1991 Alfred Friendly Press Foundation fellowship program based in Washington DC.

Some Africans in the audience encouraged the Liberian to continue but he was told to sit down. My Nigerian colleague on the panel did not immediately realise how tense the situation was and kept talking.

The argument intensified and I’m sure a fight would have ensued if we had been in a bar. Still, it was exciting to watch these people argue over democracy, which we in Papua New Guinea enjoy so much.

“Democracy means freedom for my country; what you said at the workshop was wrong.” I told my Nigerian friend later in our hotel.
room. He had argued that democracy was such an expensive proposition.

“You don’t seem to realise that many people die fighting for freedom.”

He responded, “But it provides many opportunities, especially for politicians and bureaucrats, to waste huge amounts of public funds.

“At one time 200 politicians will go to Geneva and another 200 will go to the United States. It goes on like that and wastes money.”

“How can ordinary people complain if a military regime or a one-party government is corrupt and suppressive?” I asked.

The Nigerian stuck to his guns so I left the argument to my colleagues from Uganda and Tanzania. They knew best the political situation on the African continent.

But I was aware that many Africans fled to the West for refuge from political repression and atrocities that plagued their countries.

Some of the Africans at the convention were victims of human rights abuse. I met one such person on a street corner in Washington DC. He asked me for some money.

“You from Africa,” he inquired.

“Yes,” I lied.

“I am from Africa too - from Ghana,” he said. “I need four dollars to get back to New York. Please help me.”

He said he had come to America three months ago to see his sister-in-law in Washington but she had moved and he didn’t know where.

He was in his mid-20s and I noticed beads of sweat streaming down his face. I took pity on him and gave him some money.

The boy took it and carefully bundled it together with some dollar bills he must have collected from other people that evening. He put the bundle in his shirt pocket and looked at me and said politely, “Thank you my brother.”

Without another word he hurried down the street towards the Salvation Army where he said he was being looked after.

African political refugees and immigrants to the US could move around freely. But refugees to East Germany, then under Communist control, faced a wave of racial violence.

They were accused of stealing jobs that would otherwise go to Germans. In a town 78 miles northwest of Berlin, neo-Nazis threw two Namibian guest workers from a fourth floor balcony, badly
injuring them. In Dresden, an immigrant from Mozambique was killed when Neo-Nazis hurled him from a street car.

Early in 1991, in Eberswalde, police just stood and watched armed thugs attack four Africans with bats and chains, killing one. In Magdeburg, 125 kilometres west of Berlin, a Ghanaian was threatened at knife-point, chased down the street, called a ‘nigger pig’ and told to go home.

In many countries, such incidents are all too common today.

What is the lesson for PNG here?

Political leaders must avoid such scenarios at all cost and continue to uphold the democratic rights of our people, empower law enforcement agencies, respect the Ombudsman Commission and provide it with adequate resources to independently perform its constitutional duties.

If not, high level corruption, serious crime and Asian mafia gangs will tear this resource-rich country apart and reduce the people to extreme poverty.

Many people held the view that, if it wasn’t for the judiciary and non-government agencies like the churches, Papua New Guinea would have long become a failed state due to systemic corruption at all levels of government.

Recently, Education Minister Nick Kuman shocked the nation by revealing that K50 million under the government’s free school fee policy was stolen by fraudsters because education officers were not doing their jobs of accounting for money received by schools.

Kuman said the education officials didn’t ensure that enrolment figures complied with the actual student populations in schools. In one province, which he did not name, the 2015 enrolment was inflated by 18,000 students - in order to get more funds.

National Planning Minister Charles Abel recently said that PNG has wasted K150 billion since independence, much of it through fraudulent schemes.

There was the National Provident Fund (now Nasfund) fraud for which Jimmy Maladina was finally found guilty after 17 years for allegedly misappropriating K2.65 million when he was chairman of the fund in 1999. But Maladina appealed the decision. Finally, on 20 April, 2016, the Supreme Court bench consisting of Justices Nanu, Higgins and Sowong ruled that the trial judge, Sir Gibbs Salika, didn’t have the evidence to convict Mr Maladina and it quashed the
conviction and acquitted Mr Maladina of any wrongdoing.

But yet, there have been many other cases, and many more presumably still undiscovered. They happen because the government appoints departmental heads and CEOs of statutory agencies without much scrutiny. A number of these top bureaucrats either ignore corruption or are heavily involved in criminal activities themselves.

This would come to a grinding halt if a new system of appointing top bureaucrats was adopted for PNG. A nominee for a top post would be screened and confirmed through a Parliamentary confirmation committee comprising government and opposition.

If a nominee was involved in illegal activities, like sexual abuse in the workplace, victims would be empowered to stand up and testify.

This system was used by the United States in the confirmation of US Supreme Court nominee Judge Clarence Thomas in 1991. The proceedings were telecast live and extensively covered by the media.

Thomas emphatically denied charges of sexual harassment and repeatedly invoked racial themes in his own defence and, in a move to gain sympathy among blacks, he accused the all-white Senate of conducting a ‘high-tech lynching.’

When I saw this, I couldn’t believe that a wronged woman would stand up in this way. Being from PNG, where women tend to be suppressed and subservient to menfolk and where the wantok system rules supreme, I found the confirmation hearings amazing.

In the end Judge Clarence Thomas was confirmed by a 52–48 vote, the narrowest margin for approval in more than a century.

Maybe, PNG could adopt such a system so members from both government and opposition are appointed to a Parliamentary confirmation committee which can drill candidates for top positions - judges, ombudsman, police commissioner, agency CEOs, departmental heads and others to check their character and merits and screen them thoroughly.

It’s a system that would weed out corrupt people who have been recycled in government systems over and over again since independence.
The Slave’s House: Remembering the Cruelty of Man Against Man

When Papua New Guinea prepared for its 40 years of independence anniversary celebrations in 2015, I was reminded of Massamba Sonko, a young Senegalese man.

At the time I met him, he was a student at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland in the United States.

We were happy to be friends from two developing regions - him from West Africa, me from Melanesia - experiencing life in America. But there was a big difference between us - his people had been under French rule for over 300 years before they got independence in 1964.

My people in the Highlands had had contact with the outside world for just 50 years at the time while I personally had been in contact with the ‘white man’ for just 17 years. I had seen a kiap come into my village for the first time to conduct a census in 1958.

Sonko shocked me with his disturbing story of slavery in Africa. My people of Enga had fought brutal tribal wars but there was always reconciliation in the end through compensation payments, intermarriage, trade and commerce. We had never owned or sold another human being.

Sonko was from the island of Goree, two miles off Dakar, the capital of Senegal. He told me a Slaves House stands on the island where the ancestors of African Americans were kept in appalling conditions.
Hundreds of thousands of men, women and children from all over Africa were held there and sent to the Americas as slaves starting in the 16th century.

“The Slaves House is actually an ancient fortified warehouse which has walls of stone and one door facing the sea,” Sonko said. “It was owned by white men and guarded by soldiers.”

Goree Island was not the only fort protecting the slave trade, there were many others along the coast of West Africa down to Angola in the south.

The slaves were convicted criminals, prisoners of war, people born into slavery and people who had been kidnapped. At the coastal ports the slaves were exchanged for iron, guns, gunpowder, cloth, gin and other manufactured goods from Europe.

The slaves were branded like cows and locked in the fort to await the next ship to the Americas where they would work on plantations to produce sugar, rum, cotton and tobacco.

Sonko’s story touched my innermost being; I almost wept. I had known that African Americans were descended from slaves but I don’t think I would have known the full story if I hadn’t met him.

“Many blacks cry as soon as they enter the rooms where slaves were chained to the walls,” Sonko said. “Mohammed Ali, Michael Jackson, James Brown, MC Hammer, Bob Marley - they all wept in the Slaves House with its door of no return open to the sea.”

Sonko is from the Mandigo tribe, to which African American author the late Alex Haley traced his slave ancestor, Kunta Kinte, in his best-selling book *Roots*.

On some weekends while I was in the US, I took solitary walks along the edge of Lake Erie and looked north towards Canada. Many a slave from the Southern states made their escape across this lake to freedom in Canada.

In 1830, one such slave, Josiah Henson, and his mother were later sold separately and the boy almost starved to death from neglect until he was also bought by his mother’s new master. The experience did not break Henson’s spirit.

For many years, not only did he manage the planting, raising and harvesting crops of wheat, oats, barley, potatoes, corn and tobacco but he also took them to market, bargained skilfully and brought home the profits to his master.
Henson decided to escape to Canada and freedom after he had been deceived when trying to buy himself out from slavery.

As a free man, he was productive and successful in his new life. He established a successful sawmill and shipped walnut timber to Boston. He used the profits to found a multiracial school. Henson later made several trips to the South and helped gain freedom for another 118 slaves.

These are big stories.

Not only did early black Americans work on their master’s plantations; they fought in the War of Independence against England. Zechery Prince was killed. Gad Asher was blinded. Slem Poor was commended for bravery. They are among 5,000 ‘forgotten’ slaves and free blacks who fought in the war.

In Washington DC, as I walked down the steps after viewing the famous marble statue of Abraham Lincoln in his famous sitting position, I looked across the Reflecting Pool towards the Washington Monument.

By 2020, near here, will stand a National Liberty Monument - a memorial to honour those 5,000 of African descent who served as soldiers or sailors or provided civilian assistance during the American Revolutionary War.

At Port Moresby’s Ela Beach, Papua New Guinea has a bronze bust of Raphael Oimbari helping a wounded soldier. It was erected in honour of the ‘Fuzzy Wuzzy Angels’ who were of such importance to the Allies during World War II.

But perhaps the PNG government should allocate land at a prime location on which to erect a national monument to our founding fathers and the early pioneers who will stand watch over Port Moresby, our capital city.

It would be a national symbol of pride, patriotism and freedom.
Racism, Individualism & Making it Big in a Changing Society

It was near DuPont Circle in Washington DC that I saw the two men - one white, one black - confront each other over a parking space.

They swore at each other for three minutes.

If this was in Papua New Guinea, wantoks would have quickly taken sides and punches exchanged. Rocks and bottles would have followed and a full scale fight would have ensued.

Here there was no crowd of bystanders. People cast curious glances and went their way as the two men continued to insult each other. Before too long a police vehicle arrived on the scene and sent the two men on their way.

The next day - sharing a taxi with a Malaysian girl - the ageing African American driver threatened to cut up a young white man driving a red car with Virginia number plates.

We were just about to turn on to a four-lane highway when the white man nearly smashed his car into us. If he had, the driver’s side would have taken the impact.

Understandably upset, the cabbie shouted at the other driver to stop. Instead, he made a rude sign with his fingers and drove on down the highway. This made the old man angrier - me too - and we charged down the highway in hot pursuit.

“I know how to handle him. I’m 56 but I can still do it. You know these white guys, they still think they’re teaching the black man,” the cabbie fumed.
“They’re racist. I’ve been fighting against it a long time. If I wasn’t carrying you guys, I would have done him good. I grew up doing it,” he said.

So saying, he pulled a long knife from under his seat and stabbed the empty air in front of him. The Malaysian girl was terrified. I turned around in my seat and comforted her with a smile.

At the next traffic light, we caught up with the white man, who appeared to be in his early thirties. In an instant, the cabbie raced to the fellow’s car, kicked at it and told him to open up.

“You see this?” the cabbie said, flourishing the knife. “Now, come on, be a man, open up,” he demanded.

The cabbie tried to force open the window of the red car but fortunately the lights turned to green and the car took off like a crimson streak. It overtook several cars before turning into a side road.

“That should teach him a lesson,” the cabbie commented. “I didn’t get him but somebody else will do it for me.

“Sooner or later he’ll smash into somebody else. Believe me he will, and that somebody will beat him up. That fellow could have killed us. Life is precious. People should enjoy it.”

We finally arrived at our destination and parted company with this tough old guy.

“Goodbye son, have a nice day,” he waved.

I don’t need to tell you that racism is a big issue in the United States. Really big.

“One reason we’re having problems now with these ultra conservative people is because they don’t know our history,” says Arthur E Thomas, president of the mostly black Central State University.

“They think black folks came here to serve white folks as slaves. They don’t know there were highly complex civilisations in Africa when Europe was still uncivilised.

“When Central State gets less than one percent of the higher education budget, it’s not a money issue, it’s a race issue.”

Many foreigners I met in America agreed that racism was a problem the country had to shake off.

“They are still racists,” said a long-time resident. “They are still conscious of their backgrounds.”
But most Americans don’t see it that way. To them, racism is a tiny grain of sand.

Retired African American judge, Del Rio, one of the organisers of a 1960s civil rights demonstration in Detroit in which Dr Martin Luther King Jr took part, says marches are no longer viable for blacks to achieve success today.

“Marches were useful to express our frustration and to attempt to avert riots,” Rio says, “But the drivers are different today. We have to learn that economics is the way to freedom and that the way to economics is through education.”

People like Dr King, Judge Rio and others have been great leaders and role models for enterprising African Americans.

Rio started his life literally in a trash can where his mother had abandoned him shortly after birth. He studied and worked hard and became a real estate tycoon before the age of 30.

He was successful in politics and was admitted to the Michigan Bar and later elected as a Judge of Detroit’s Recorder’s Court. In 1991, he was driving around in a zippy convertible or in the comfort of his chauffeur-driven limousine.

Del Rio had found the system to be no handicap at all.

It is hard for Papua New Guineans to emulate people like Del Rio because of our culture and way of life. His kind of success was possible because he was not responsible for the welfare of those around him.

Traditionally, Papua New Guineans share their fortnightly pay or business profits with wantoks.

Leaders in traditional PNG society were those who shared wealth with their people to maintain authority and influence.

In western society, people tend to be individualistic. They work to achieve success for themselves and their immediate families.

But it’s perhaps not surprising that more prosperous and educated Papua New Guineans are beginning to live for themselves and the success of their own immediate family members.

Our times are a-changing too.
Unexpected Loss: Sir Michael Somare’s Defeat at the United Nations & New York, the City of Cities

Mrs Renagi Renagi Lohia wept bitterly. Sir Michael Somare had just lost his bid for the largely ceremonial role as President of the 46th United Nations General Assembly.

Mrs Lohia was the only woman in our small group of Papua New Guineans standing outside the United Nations building in New York City in September 1991. Sympathisers came and shook hands with The Chief.

We had been very certain of a win - we thought Sir Michael was the hot favourite. But unexpectedly an Arab won and the result stunned us.

Sir Michael was the first leader from the South Pacific region to be nominated for this prestigious role but could manage only 47 votes against Saudi Arabia’s Samir Shihabi’s 83.

“We lost out because of Africa,” Ambassador Lohia said bluntly. He believed many of the African leaders were bribed. “They were bought off.”

Education Minister Utula Samana blamed PNG’s downfall on the Gulf War coalition partners and Western Europe.

“They voted for Saudi Arabia as a way of saying ‘thank you’ for the role it played in the Gulf War,” he said.

Most of our 47 votes came from Asian countries, other Pacific Island states, the Caribbean and Latin America. The only definite vote from the Middle East was from Israel.

“The Middle East is always in the news. We want somebody impartial to deal with issues affecting Israel,” Minister Arie Tenne,
Israel’s permanent representative to the United Nations, had told me at a pre-election gathering the night before.

The election of Mr Shihabi by secret ballot was unusual. The General Assembly presidency is ordinarily rotated among the regions of the world. But in 1991 a three-way race developed. For 19 months, Ambassador Renagi Renagi Lohia and his staff had worked hard to lobby support.

But then Yemen entered the race and Saudi Arabia also nominated, arguing that the Gulf War had made it more necessary than ever for it to play a bigger international role.

“Still it is good for PNG,” Ambassador Lohia said, “because we have exposed ourselves. You can’t trade if you are not known.”

Sir Michael remained calm as the results were declared. He sat through to the end as president-elect Samir Shihabi read a prepared speech in Arabic. I was proud of Sir Michael’s great patience and diplomacy.

In a career spanning nearly 60 years, the Grand Chief has been a teacher, broadcast journalist, politician, opposition leader and Prime Minister. Having steered PNG towards independence and served as its first head of government, Somare is considered the founding father of the nation.

In 2015, when PNG celebrated 40 years of independence, Sir Michael and his long-time colleague, Sir Julius Chan, were still members of Parliament.

Born in 1936, Sir Michael entered the PNG Parliament in 1968 at age 32. He was elected leader of the newly formed PNG United Pati, PANGU for short, and has retained that position since.

In 1973, Somare became the first and only Chief Minister of the self-governing Territory of Papua New Guinea and implemented the task of negotiating with Australia to lay the foundation for PNG’s independence.

This was attained on 16 September 1975 in a peaceful political transition. PNG remains a member of the Commonwealth with Queen Elizabeth II as head of state.

At age 39, Sir Michael became the first Prime Minister of an independent PNG. He has been returned to Parliament each year since by the East Sepik people.
I had flown from Washington DC to New York to celebrate Sir Michael’s ascendancy to the UN presidency but was disappointed that I had to return home empty handed.

Now, a handful of us Papua New Guineans sat around two tables at a restaurant. We were united in soul and spirit - a true feeling of national unity was obvious although we shared the sorrow of loss.

Such is politics.

I did not want to read or see Sir Michael’s defeat on television in the hotel room so I explored New York City in the evening. With me was Perai Manai from Tapini in Central Province.

Manai had come with Utula Samana to witness Sir Michael’s election at the United Nations for presidency. To forget our disappointment, we headed for the Empire State Building, which was always open until midnight. This was my third climb to the top so I was sort of Perai’s guide.

We travelled 1,200 feet a minute on one of the 73 elevators which run seven miles of shafts and is always teeming with visitors.

The view from the 102nd floor was so majestic - it was like being on the top of Mt Wilhelm in Simbu - from where Madang’s Light House is seen clearly. The difference was that this was a steel and concrete structure surrounded with a jungle of sky-scrapers.

I could see the white Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre which was the only structure that was taller than the Empire State Building with 110 floors on the New York landscape.

Another landmark I saw in the distance was the Statue of Liberty on Staten Island, which was also visited daily by hordes of visitors.

When it gets darker, the incomparable view is a fantasy of lights and stars sparkling and dancing against a panoramic background of darkness. I got the feeling that I was up there in the sky among the stars. I was told, the view is a different spectacle when it rains or snows.

Over three million people from every state in the US and people from nearly every country in the world pay their way to the top of this man-made super structure.

I was so immersed in the beauty when all of a sudden, a gust of wind nearly blew my Highlands cap away. I had to hold it down firmly on my balding head wondering what would happen to a person who fell off from the top.
Would he fall directly below or be blown away to some distant place? And what if the power went off when I was up there? I would have had no option but walk the 1,860 steps down onto the street.

Lovers I was told, do not enjoy a kiss on the top of the Empire State Building due to atmospheric conditions. I doubted if this was true. Like Doubting Thomas, I had to try myself to believe. But there was nobody to kiss.

One evening at an all-night restaurant under the Empire State Building we sat talking and enjoying the evening until 2am. Before retiring for the night, one of my friends from Wisconsin, a professional photographer suggested he take some pictures of us on the street.

All of a sudden, a man came out from nowhere and started to sing - whose story I alluded to about poverty on the streets of London

Next morning my friend from Wisconsin rang me to say that his camera and other personal effects had been stolen from his car, which he had parked outside a friend’s apartment.

There was no picture he could give me to take back home as a memory of my climb to the top of the majestic Empire State Building. And only a distant memory remains in my mind now of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre - the nerve centre of world trade and commerce.

A decade after I left America, the Twin Towers were blown-up by Osama Bin Laden’s Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda who flew two hijacked passenger jets straight into the buildings on 11th September, 2001. This tragedy is now referred to as 9/11.

In coordinated attacks, four passenger airliners which all departed from airports on the U.S. East Coast bound for California - were hijacked by 19 al-Qaeda terrorists to fly them into buildings.

Two of the planes, American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175, were crashed into the North and South towers, respectively, of the World Trade Center complex in New York City.

A third plane, American Airlines Flight 77, was crashed into the Pentagon - the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense in Arlington County, Virginia.

The fourth plane, United Airlines Flight 93, initially was steered toward Washington, D.C., but crashed into a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, after its passengers tried to overcome the hijackers.
In total, the attacks claimed the lives of 2,996 people - including the 19 hijackers and caused at least $10 billion in property and infrastructure damage and $3 trillion in total costs. It was the deadliest incident for firefighters and law enforcement officers in the history of the United States, with 343 and 72 killed respectively.

America immediately declared war on terrorism and Osama Bin Laden was the number one target. But he evaded capture for almost a decade before he was located in Pakistan by members of the U.S. military in May 2011 and shot dead.

What if the terrorists had flown the planes into the Twin Towers when I was having lunch with my colleagues in one of the basement restaurants? It gives me the creeps even today.

But the memories of the two magnificent buildings as I had seen them from the Empire State Building remains in my memory. I cannot get myself to believe that such creations are susceptible to attacks by fanatics.
Do you by any chance remember Lobo and his song *My First Time*? It was popular among young people in the 1970s. I recall students at Lae Technical College playing it over and over in the cool evenings under the big rain trees there.

The song stuck with me. It reminds me of ‘first time’ experiences in my lifetime. Like when I attended my first *tanim bet* courting session. Or when I saw Jumbo my first elephant in 1972 at the Mt Hagen Show.

Later I was to see more than an elephant. On a visit to a zoo in Cleveland, Ohio, I added to this lions, zebras, giraffes, bears, monkeys (including two gorillas), camels, tigers, hippopotami, llamas, kangaroos and many more.

I also saw different species of birds, fish and plants - all for the first time.

To be honest, I was amazed I could see all this from around the world in the one place.

Representing Papua New Guinea were two tree kangaroos, a pair of parrots, some Queen Victoria Crowned pigeons and a lone bird of paradise. What an amazing feat man was able to bring them all to the one place for the benefit of city dwellers,

I wouldn’t have been at the zoo if it wasn’t for David Minnich. He and his family had lived at Gusap in Lae between 1987 and 1990 with Habite for Humanity.

David suggested that I should visit Metroparks Zoo where his wife Donna had told him of seeing *sampela kumul na sampela kapul*. At the time I felt homesick and decided I should see something familiar.
I felt close to the tree kangaroos and the birds and stood very close to their cages and made noises to attract their attention and make them aware that a countryman was around.

The creatures did not respond. The tree kangaroos kept on eating lettuce leaves while the birds stared at me stupidly.

A few weeks later at the Cleveland Museum of Art I found a section on PNG. There were a few carvings from East Sepik, Gulf and West New Britain and tapa cloth from Oro.

Over at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History there was more from PNG. A stuffed bird of paradise, ceremonial kina shells used in Mt Hagen and a Jimi River stone axe.

“Does this small section represent all of PNG?” I asked my friend Joe Daprano.

“Sure it doesn’t,” Daprano replied. “PNG has a diverse culture and this collection doesn’t really represent the country.”

Daprano had worked with the Division of Health in Vanimo with the American Peace Corps, for two years and knew PNG’s diverse cultures well enough. He was now a student at medical school.

In fact, the biggest collection of PNG artefacts was probably at the Wilberforce Afro-American Museum and Cultural Centre near Dayton in Ohio set up by Dr Paul Brennan.

I spent much time watching a type of spindly monkey with tiny long limbs which inhabited a small island who appeared to be organized in family units. I particularly liked to see the mother monkeys caring for their young ones, like humans do.

My mind drifted to the now defunct Seapark at Ela Beach in Port Moresby. I wondered why operations had stopped. I went there twice and liked watching the seals perform which were rewarded with fish after they successfully accomplished a trick.

And what had happened to the Baiyer River Bird Sanctuary in the Western Highlands province?

I felt proud to see the tree kangaroos and the birds at the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. A bit of PNG was there which appreciated the richness and uniqueness of our multiple cultures.

Imagine, Americans did not have elephants, lions, kangaroos etc. on their continent but they import them, look after them, bred them and use them for entertainment and the education of their children who take pride in them.

When I came back home, I found it hard to describe to my
children and relatives the hippo, tiger, lion, giraffes, monkeys and all the other animals I had seen at the Metroparks Zoo in Cleveland.

I would like to now end my American sojourn with experiences I had in West Virginia.
Country Roads Just Like Home

I could have taken $76 in change for a $50 note from an elderly lady in a busy department store in Charleston, West Virginia, in revenge for something that happened to me in New York City.

I had been cheated by a taxi driver. I got the taxi in Manhattan after getting off the bus from LaGuardia Airport. I wanted to go to the Shelburne Murray Hill hotel between West 37th and West 38th Streets on Lexington Avenue.

Two men obviously friends of the Hispanic driver also got in - one either side of me.

In less than five minutes we arrived at the hotel, but the driver parked a block away. Then he asked me for $10. I quickly got out of the taxi. I noticed he hadn’t switched on the meter. I gave him $5 saying the distance was very short. But he insisted I pay him $10.

The tone of his voice gave me an uneasy feeling. What were his two buddies doing in the taxi anyway?

It was 10 o’clock at night and there weren’t many people around. I was isolated, strangely dressed in my hand-woven Highlands cap and boasting a long Highlands beard. I’d been warned of muggings so I thrust a $10 bill into his outstretched hands and scooted away.

My colleagues from 12 different countries were already at the hotel for the press fellowship program. Someone advised me to report the matter to police but I declined. New York is a pulsating cosmopolitan city full of enterprising people. To argue over $10 seemed trivial.

In the time I was in the US, I found that each American city was different. When I was assigned to Charleston, West Virginia, the pace of life suited me. There were normal people on the street. I didn’t
read of major crime. When I went to the police station with the Charleston Daily Mail's crime reporter, there was nothing to report.

“It’s boring, sometimes you have nothing to do,” the reporter complained.

“It shows how peaceful your city is,” I said.

“I never realised that,” he smiled.

I was in West Virginia in the autumn. The air was crisp, the afternoon warm and sunny and the colours of Fall (Autumn) surrounded us. The leaves of the trees like the tupelo and sassafras were changing their colours from green to the colours of the rainbow.

Visitors delighted in the beauty of the mountains in PNG but they are boring, they remain green all year round. I didn’t know all the trees on a mountain changed colour like this spread before my eyes.

The view from Hawks Nest State Park was really breath taking. I gasped in awe at the panorama spread before me. The scene was complete as it was reflected in the lake down in the gorge.

But suddenly like a rock thrown at a reflecting mirror the tranquillity was shattered by two men on a speed boat. The reflection reappeared as the ripples subsided.

The incredible ‘Mystery Hole’ two minute drive from Hawks Nest was another place I won’t forget. We were given a truly magical mystery tour of the premises by its owner, Donald R. Wilson.

Wilson had built it after World War II but some of the feats really defy nature. I saw balls rolling up-hill. It was hard to believe, Wilson was standing sideways in a room. He continued to baffle me when he placed a chair on the wall and just sat on it without any support.

When I wanted to move to another part of the building, I found myself glued to the couch Wilson had asked me to sit on before his demonstrations. When I did finally get up, I felt dizzy and walked out of the ‘hole’ as if I were drunk.

Thus I enjoyed my stay in this mountain state. I slept in their houses, ate with them and mixed freely. Even now, I cherish my experiences in West Virginia.

Before flying to Cleveland, Ohio, I went to a busy department store to buy a dress for my daughter. I picked one for $24, handing over a $50 bill. The elderly lady gave me $76 in change.

“Madam, you are giving me the wrong change. I gave you $50 not $100,” I said.
“Oh did you?” she gasped. She did not take back the money immediately but opened her till.

“Oh, there it is. One is sometimes so busy mistakes can be made.”

“I do not want to go back to my country and brag that an old lady gave me $100 for $50,” I said.

“Thank you. Enjoy your stay here and I wish you a safe trip back to your country,” she said bathing me in a warm smile.

In Cleveland, Plain Dealer newspaper columnist William Miller asked me where I’ been. I related to him my experiences in West Virginia.

“Do you know the song Take Me Home, Country Roads?” he asked.

“John Denver?”

“Yes, it’s almost heaven down there, isn’t it? Denver wrote it while he was travelling there,” Miller said.

‘It’s like my home too,” I responded.

In its natural beauty, yes, PNG is almost heaven with its swaying palm trees, sandy beaches, rolling hills, high mountains and unique cultures.

But even in this paradise, like anywhere else in the world, we have our share of social problems. Some taxi drivers even try to cheat passengers in Port Moresby.

The money involved in the incident in New York and the department store in West Virginia was insignificant. But no matter, it’s improper to hurt, cheat or steal from people.

The right thing to do was to hand the money back to the elderly lady. But when she thanked me and wished me a safe return home with that glowing smile, I know it came from the bottom of her dear heart.
Mexico City & Political Upheavals at Home

“The living are conscious that they will die,” King Solomon, Ecclesiastes 9:5.

“I am not scared of dying, but I am scared of not being here.” Thembi Ngubane HIV/AIDS victim, South Africa.
AIDS: Confessions of a Sinful Life & Crying for a Vaccine in the City of the Gods

Once again the familiar HOLLYWOOD sign appeared through the mist as the Qantas Boeing 767 from Brisbane prepared to land at Los Angeles International Airport.

I was on my way to Mexico to participate in HIV/AIDS training prior to attending the 17th International AIDS Conference in Mexico City in 2008. The study trip was sponsored by the National Press Foundation in Washington DC.

When I was in the US 17 years before, champion basketball star Earvin ‘Magic’ Johnson declared his HIV status through the powerful media. I was overwhelmed that Johnson was able to apologise to his fans and to some hundreds of women with whom he had contact.

Until then, I had never heard of men having had sexual intercourse with so many women.

Well, okay, I am from the polygamous Highlands region of Papua New Guinea and know men who have up to 15 wives, sometimes more, but they married each of them by paying bride price and followed strict traditional laws, norms and values to start a family and raise children. Sex outside of marriage was taboo.

The institution of marriage was respected, a power base from which to expand influence, an opportunity to foster peace and harmony and to establish trade relations with the women’s people.

But as the 21st century really got rolling, PNG was changing fast. Tribal norms and values were breaking down. Family units too were disintegrating. And other problems appeared. Inequalities in
education, unemployment, illiteracy, poor housing, social problems like prostitution and other woes.

Children were becoming rebellious. Instead of going to school, male and female students consumed homebrew and got involved in cult activities. School fights commonly resulted in deaths.

Diseases like HIV/AIDS wiped out thousands of people as the virus spread like wildfire throughout PNG. Millions of kina were spent by the government and international aid agencies.

Many brave men and women in Papua New Guinea who lived with the virus came out publicly to announce their status.

Imagine an innocent pregnant mother going to the prenatal clinic and finding out she is HIV positive. How does she break the devastating news to her husband and family members?

I once knew a man who confessed his sexual exploits only after his pregnant wife returned a negative blood test. He had spent some agonising hours waiting for his wife to return home with the test result.

As he waited, all sorts of dreadful thoughts clouded his mind. His wife of course knew nothing of his extramarital affairs. When she got home, he found to his relief that she had a negative test result.

He got on his knees, thanked God Almighty for having looked after him and took his wife’s hand and kissed it.

His perplexed wife looked on silently. Then, to her surprise, he confessed his sinful life and apologised to her right there on the spot and promised never to involve himself in sinful activities again. With tears in her eyes, his wife accepted his confession.

Anyway, here is the man’s full narrative.....

“I have a good wife and between us we have produced three healthy children. But I am stupid, very stupid. I was unfaithful to my wife for many years knowing full well that AIDS was wiping out millions of people around the world.

“Fearing that I might have caught HIV, I secretly went to a private clinic in Port Moresby and had some blood tests. When the results returned negative, I was very happy. But I continued with my affairs. I still feel terribly embarrassed and accuse myself for having been an idiot.

“Six years ago, after the test in Port Moresby, my wife became pregnant with our fourth child. It was now compulsory for all
pregnant women to be tested and when it was time for her to go to the prenatal clinic, I began to worry. I silently prepared for the worst.

“What if I had contracted the virus and passed it onto her, even though I had taken necessary precautions? Some doctors say the condom cannot be trusted. How would I react if my wife broke the news to me that she was HIV positive?

“Evil thoughts began to form in my stupid mind. Should I blame her if she returned a positive test? Or should I own up and disappear to some remote corner of PNG? Or better still, should I murder myself?

“I spent some nerve-wracking hours as I waited at home to see what her reaction would be when she came home.

“Her expression was normal. She did not say anything. She resumed her household chores. Without giving any reason, I requested to see the test results. The word ‘NEGATIVE’ was written on the card.

“The next moment I was thanking God. The good Lord had kept me safe even when I was a mischievous fornicating sinner. I confessed to my wife about my deceitful life. I promised her I would not get involved in such activities again.

“I felt a weight lifting off my shoulders - the weight of my guilt. Worry and tension can kill a man and needlessly I had brought this burden unto myself.

“A couple of months later a healthy child was born into our family. My older children and I sat around the baby and ate some chicken we had cooked. That child is now in primary school.

“My advice to husbands involved in extramarital affairs is to stop. Be honest and love your wives with all your heart and try to spend quality time with them. Our partners are our soul-mates. They left their parents, relatives and friends to cling to us and to be buried in our lands.

“I know how many times I cheated on my wife. I thank God I did not catch the virus.”

Like this man, five people in Mexico City also confessed to us sixty international journalists how they had contracted HIV. One of them cried his heart out and sobbed like a child wishing for a vaccine to be produced soon.
The memory of these five people is etched forever in my memory, they were descendants from a once rich and powerful ancient culture which is shrouded with mystery and intrigue.

Their people used to offer human sacrifice to the Gods from the top of giant pyramids - ancient stone structures like those found in Egypt.

Two giant pyramids are found at Teotihuacan an ancient ruin near Mexico City, which I was privileged to visit during the 17th International AIDS Conference in 2008.

But before my visit to the pyramids, we 60 international journalists met the five people at the Clinica Condesa - an impressive government funded health facility specializing in free treatment for 4,000 patients in the city.

The man who wept like a child was in his mid-fifties - one of two men and three women who expressed remorse at how they stubbornly contracted the virus - each in a different risky sexual act.

In-between sobs, the man told us his desire to see some sort of a cure or an HIV and AIDS vaccine developed soon to save him, his four colleagues and the world from the scourge.

They bravely told us how they had contracted the virus and warned against risky sexual behaviour. With broad smiles spreading across their faces, they wished us a safe stay in the city and a safe return to our countries.

A safe trip I did make home but not without learning a bit about the Mexican people and their ancient past. I have always been inspired by books like *Chariots of Fire*, *Montezuma's Daughter* and the *Kon Tiki Expedition* which talked about the advanced Indian civilizations of South America.

I longed to see some of these ruins and boarded a tour bus. Our first stop was Templo Mayor an important historical site within the city limits. Known as Tenochtitlan, it was the hub of the ancient Aztec empire.

The Indians who once lived there were gifted architects, mathematicians and artisans. Herman Cortes, the first of the conquistadores described Templo Mayor as a most beautiful city but he destroyed it forever.

They killed the civil, military and religious leaders but often the women were spared and married off to the conquerors. Spanish
landlords replaced Indian nobles as masters of the estates and reduced the people to nothing.

But many centuries before the Spanish destroyed Tenochtitlan, the pyramids and temples at Teotihuacan 30 miles north east of Mexico City - and the 125,000 people who once lived there had met a different fate. They had simply vanished without a trace. But the ruins are still there today.

The ancient metropolis is thought to have been established in 100 BC and kept on growing until AD 250 and lasted until sometime between the 7th and 8th centuries AD. It was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1987.

The Pyramid of the Moon and Pyramid of the Sun are two imposing stone structures at the site. They loomed over us as we drove along an ancient narrow road paved with round grey stones and pebbles.

Gift shops dotted along the route were full of hand-woven clothes, colourful blankets, stone carvings, and silverware, necklaces, Mexican hats and hot food flavoured with chilly. I bought a beautiful necklace made of beads with an image of the sun as a memento for my small daughter.

Teotihuacan guards secrets that have yet to be unravelled. Human sacrifices were made here, often in correlation with astronomical events. When the site was excavated, many tombs were found, some with the remains of people sacrificed to the gods.

Many people today believe that Teotihuacan is a place of great energy where they can draw strength from. When I sweated up to the summit of the Pyramid of the Sun, I witnessed a group of Indians in white robes and red headbands meditating - all facing the sun.

From the summit, I marvelled at the same sights as had been seen by the ancient priests who ripped out the hearts of unfortunate souls for sacrifice to the gods. Even now, it drives fear in my heart when I watch Mel Gibson’s, Apocalypse a terrifying film that seems so real.

From the corner of my eyes, I saw a man carrying a bilum aim his camera and take a shot of me. He smiled and introduced himself as Fr Jan Jaloorski from Poland but now a medical doctor at Kundiawa General Hospital.

It was easy for us to meet because of the way we were dressed in our PNG attire. How proud we were to meet and share a moment at this eerie spot.
I bade farewell to Dr Jaloorski and walked the distance of the main avenue known as the Calzada de los Muertos or Avenue of the Dead. It connects the Pyramid of the Moon and the Pyramid of the Sun and other minor temples and courtyards.

It was awesome to imagine why the people had toiled so hard to build this elaborate city which had taken ages to complete only to vanish without a trace!

The answers could be found in the mythology of ancient Mexico - especially in legends of the Nahua People as had been recorded by a Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagun (1500-1590) and brought to light by Julie Black in 2000 in essays on ancient Mexico.

One is the ‘Legend of the Fifth Sun’ which is a telling of the past before the existence of the world as we know it today.

After the gods created the earth, the heavens and the underworld, a chain of destruction and creation unfolded that caused the existence of five different worlds throughout time. Each world is an age dominated by a great burning disc in the sky, and therefore each age is called a sun.

The One World *cm-a-nahuac* has existed for many millenniums. But even before the world as we know it, there were four suns and four earths. Each sun ended in a catastrophe, a cataclysm, and each time the world was created again, fatally identical to that before it.

And a new circle began, and this cycle brought about an improved form of life. The four primordial forces presided over these suns - water, earth, fire and wind - until the age of the Fifth Sun of Movement, which is the sun we live in now.

The first age was the sun of water, and the first humans were giants. These men and women, in spite of their great size, were, in reality, weak beings. When they fell, as in an accident, they fell forever.

In the second sun the people were nourished with maize water. But this sun too, was destroyed. The people were eaten by jaguars.

In the third age, the Sun of fire, men and women lived in the world and were nourished on cincocopi, an ancient form of maize. But they too met a tragic end. The sun rained fire, and all the people were transformed into turkeys.

Finally the people who lived and dwelled in the fourth age ate genuine maize as we know it, our substance, discovered by the god Quetzalcoatl. These humans, when they met their final doom, were
converted neither into fish nor turkeys, but went to live among the mountains as monkey people. This was the sun of wind.

The fifth age in which we live, the sun of movement, had its origin in Teotihuacan long, long ago. This is why Teotihuacan is called the City of the Gods. It was there that the gods united to create the age of movement. Movement is Ollin. All that exists is in constant movement like the sun across the sky. This Ollin, the sun of movement, is the world we live in today.

Another legend tells of how the world began, not with a Genesis overseen by one almighty god, but with a creation from a group effort of many gods at Teotihuacan and the courageous efforts of two in particular.

One of the deities, a deformed god with a humble spirit, became the sun and the other the moon after they had thrown themselves into a great fire. It is for these two gods that the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the moon were built and exist at Teotihuacan.

The power and might of ancient Indian Empires was evident in these ruins. I saw how the native Indians had dressed and looked like in ancient times in the city museum.

But by sheer luck, I came across a cultural dance group perform live near the museum grounds. Three beautiful girls and some men with elaborate headdresses - one in particular with a skull above his forehead danced to the haunting rhythmic beat of a three-legged stool-like drum.

They reminded me of a Mekeo Cultural dance group I saw many years ago at the Moitaka Show grounds in Port Moresby. I came home convinced that as we learn to understand and appreciate other people’s histories, cultures and traditions - we will soon learn to respect and be proud of our own rich cultural heritage passed on to us from generation to generation.

Today, Indians still live in the areas where the ancient civilizations flourished and sell all sorts of artefacts - cloths, colourful hand woven blankets, silverware, necklaces etc.

And evidence of how advanced and powerful the Indian empires were was evident in all the many other well-kept ruins in Mexico, the city museum and the library, which I also visited.

But if Christopher Columbus had not discovered the ancient civilizations like the Toltec, Aztecs, Incas and the Mayas would the
man living with HIV/AIDS virus at the Clinica Condesa have cried for an AIDS vaccine?

But colonisation cannot be blamed entirely because today’s lifestyle diseases like HIV and AIDS are brought on by individuals themselves.

Like my cousin brother, Marakos Ene whose story I will relate died because he did not control his craving for alcohol despite my warnings. He failed to understand how precious life was. He lived only for the moment.

So far, an estimated 25 million people have died since AIDS was first discovered more than 30 years ago. And AIDS was first reported in PNG in 1987.

Over 33 million people, half of them women, live with the virus all over the world. Each day over 7,500 more women, men and children became infected as over 15 million children were orphaned.

Intelligent men and women continue to work hard to find a cure. And scientific evidence supports the idea that an AIDS vaccine is possible.

Researchers know that the immune systems of some individuals have the natural ability to prevent infection with HIV. In other individuals, the immune system appears to control the progression of the disease.

Experimental vaccines against simian immunodeficiency virus (SIV), a close cousin of HIV that infects monkeys, have been shown to prevent AIDS. Some HIV infected individuals produce antibodies that are capable of neutralizing the majority of strains of HIV circulating in the world today. When these antibodies were injected into non-human primates, it worked like an effective vaccine.

Together these findings support the scientific potential for a vaccine to prevent AIDS in humans. Currently there were more than two dozen potential vaccines in clinical trials in humans, and at least as many were in earlier stages of study.

The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI), is one of many organizations involved in developing a vaccine. With the release of their AIDS Vaccine Blueprint 2008 at the International AIDS Conference in Mexico City, they sought to reset both expectations and focus in the search for an AIDS vaccine.

“The quest to develop an AIDS vaccine is at a pivotal moment in the wake of the failure of a leading AIDS Vaccine candidate nearly a
year ago. Some have questioned whether we will ever have an AIDS vaccine,” said Dr Seth Berkley, president and CEO of IAVA.

“To these skeptics, I say that developing an AIDS vaccine may take more time and innovation than we might have once imagined, but we are confident that science will prevail. The necessary direction for the field is clear and we must march forward. Future generations are counting on us to bring this epidemic to an end.”

Dr Beckley tried to set the record straight about the current state of AIDS vaccine research and development and offered a series of interim goals to bring the field closer to the ultimate goal - a safe, effective and accessible AIDS vaccine.

“Twenty five years since the discovery of HIV as the cause of AIDS, nearly 7,500 people continue to become infected with HIV each day,” said Dr Peter Piot Executive Director of the joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS. I am encouraged and inspired to see that IAVI’s AIDS Vaccine Blueprint proposes a well-defined roadmap to accelerate the development of a critical tool for elimination of this terrible disease.”

The blueprint acknowledges that much work remains to be done before an AIDS vaccine will be in hand but details the considerable advances that have been made and the exciting prospects ahead.

“Strong scientific evidence in both humans and animal models suggests that developing an AIDS vaccine is possible,” said Dr Wayne Koff, Senior Vice President of Research and Development at IAVI. “The challenge we face now is how to translate advances made in our understanding of the virus and the human immune responses to it into promising candidates as quickly and safely as possible.”

The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative was a global not for profit organization whose mission was to ensure the development of safe, effective, accessible, preventative HIV vaccines for use throughout the world. Founded in 1996 and operational in 24 countries, IAVI and its network collaborates research and develop vaccine candidates.

History suggests that with major epidemics of infectious diseases, like smallpox and polio, only mass immunization programs with an effective vaccine can bring an end to epidemics.

Today’s medicines against HIV/AIDS called antiretroviral treatments are not cures. They are highly expensive, in part because
they must be taken every day for life. A vaccine should be seen as a comprehensive response to HIV/AIDS.

It took up to a hundred years to develop effective vaccines for serious diseases like polio. The search for an AIDS vaccine has been on for only about 16 years - and it will definitely take many more years before an effective and safe vaccine is developed.

The man who cried for a vaccine at the Clinica Condesa in Mexico City did so for multitudes of others the world over. Because it was the ultimate wish and desire of everybody that a safe and secure AIDS vaccine was developed soon to save mankind from this most devastating disease.

If not AIDS has the potential to wipe out whole tribes and villages without a trace in countries like Papua New Guinea where the literacy rate is very low, road networks poor, and hardly any health or education services in rural areas where thousands of rural people are concentrated.

Yes, villagers could be easily wiped out without a trace as it happened to that ancient Indian race at Teotihuacan near Mexico City, except the cause of that catastrophe remains a mystery!
Losing a Relative to AIDS, Blight of Violent Rapes of Defenseless Women & ‘We do not want to die alone’

On my way to Mexico City in 2008, I told my cousin brother Marakos Ene the purpose of my trip - to attend the 17th International AIDS conference. I told him to beware of the HIV virus so prevalent in Port Moresby.

I had to warn him because he appeared to be drinking heavily at the wrong locations in the city.

Tradition says that you are obliged to talk to a next of kin at least once hoping the message will stick. But it appeared Marakos did not heed my warning. He died from the scourge.

He had gone to Port Moresby to seek medical treatment in early 2001 after he was chopped on his right shoulder by another villager during an argument in a garden in our village.

After his wound healed, he did not return home but stayed on in the city and found a job as a security guard for a major chain of supermarkets who paid him well.

Marakos was alert and active with a good personality and communication skills. But he had failed to understand the real meaning of life itself. He was carelessly spending his hard earned cash on entertainment.

As soon as he began to notice symptoms, he had moved in with completely different people from another Highlands province. He avoided physical contact with us, his own close relatives.
He was probably ashamed to reveal his status. When he was about to die relatives made arrangements and put him on a flight to Wapenamanda. I picked him up at the airport and took him home to Wabag. He had been away for twelve years in the city.

My family made him feel welcome, expressed our love and compassion by nursing him for two days in our house. Then I took him to the Wabag General Hospital. I told him he had nothing to fear or be ashamed of. All diseases were potentially dangerous and can kill but only AIDS had no cure. But it was manageable and there were drugs available which prolonged life.

For three weeks we encouraged him to eat, drink and think positive and his condition improved. I told him it was possible he could go back to Port Moresby and maybe work again.

But then his condition somehow worsened. He refused to eat, refused medical treatment and asked to be taken home to see his mother, Paula, in the village. I found it hard to convince him anymore So I arranged transport and told him we would depart for home on the morning of 9th June, 2013.

An hour before we were due to pick him up at the hospital ward word came that Marakos had passed away quietly in his sleep at about 5am. I was totally convinced he had willed himself to die.

It seemed he only wanted his body to be transported home. Even in his state he must have been ashamed to face his mother and all our relatives.

Unlike him, another person living with the virus, Mathew Tena did not care about fear or traditional taboos. Like ‘Magic’ Johnson, he went to the press and revealed his status and warned people about the consequences of unprotected sex.

Tena’s action was brave but some people pressured provincial health authorities to get him tested again to confirm his HIV status. They felt he was lying to access funds from the National AIDS Council.

“You cannot lie about your health to make money. I am only trying to help people because AIDS has affected me and it can happen to other people too,” Tena said.

True to his commitment to really help vulnerable people, he did a second blood test to satisfy those who doubted him.

This admirable action prompted four other People Living with AIDS (PLWA) - two male and two female to declare openly their
HIV status as well. Together, they formed a team and warned people on the dangers of unprotected sex.

Mathew believed he picked up the virus between 2003 and 2004. He developed symptoms and tested HIV positive in 2005. Professional counsellors provided him with support, comfort and advised him about healthy living.

For a while he did some work with the National AIDS Council Secretariat in Port Moresby promoting condom use among Port Moresby city residents. He attributes his exceptionally good health to the advice he received from the experienced counsellors.

He advised people living with HIV, never to allow worry and anxiety destroy them: “Many people die from worry and resignation. Just today a body was brought down from Porgera Gold Mine. Many more bodies of young people are regularly brought in from Lae, Mt Hagen and Port Moresby because they worry too much. We must not let worry and anxiety destroy our lives,” he said.

The best thing to do he said was to accept the fact that they were infected, seek treatment and follow advice from professional counsellors and live a normal and healthy life-style.

After completing Grade 10 at Idubada Technical College in 1970, Mathew Tena joined the navy as a trainee naval officer on HMAS Lorengau based at Lombrum on Manus Island. He was the first person from the Highlands region to train as a seaman.

Two years later, he resigned and joined the Department of Information and Extension Services (DIES) in 1973 and trained as a broadcast officer with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC).

He was posted to Radio Western Highlands in Mt Hagen where he served for eight years before transferring to his own province in 1980. A new radio station christened ‘Radio Enga, Krai Bilong Miok (KBK) had just been opened in Wabag.

He changed his original surname to Turner and during his radio days, he became very popular and fans gave him many nick names as well.

This man with multiple names, hoped to get a lot of money in 2002 when he volunteered to be retrenched from the public service. But he was paid a dismal K22,000 after thirty years of service to the government.
In frustration, he picked up his cheque and went to Mt Hagen without telling his wife and children. He met a young girl of about 16 years of age at the Avi Blocks near Mt Hagen in the Western Highlands.

He took her to Lae on the bus and stayed there for two months playing pokies and on a drinking binge. The pair then boarded an Air Niugini F28 jet to Port Moresby and continued on with their reckless lifestyle.

After all the money was used up, he unsuccessfully tried to seek re-employment with the government. It was during this period that Mathew believes he picked up the virus from his young mistress, who he believes began seeing other men in the city.

“In Port Moresby, she knew that I was older than her so she must have seen a younger man. She also saw my money running dry,” Tena said. “It was much later that I learnt one of her lovers was an infected policeman.”

It was possible the young girl was already HIV positive when Mathew picked her up at Avi Blocks and landed her in the capital city. The young girl developed symptoms first and died from complications in 2006.

“I had a lot of money and met this ‘16’ and drank a lot of beer. This combination of lots of cash in your hands, beer and sex can spoil you. People must be warned not to be reckless,” he warned.

Unlike my relative, Marakos Ene who was withdrawn and too ashamed to admit his status or seek treatment, Mathew Tena, the first Highlander to train as a naval officer became the first Engan to break traditional taboos to openly declare his HIV status and warned of the consequences of promiscuity.

He went to church and wanted to die with respect. He believed strongly God would forgive and bless him for saving other people’s lives from catching the dreaded disease.

While Mathew Tena revealed his status and warned others from contracting the virus, a handful of infected youths deliberately spread the virus by raping three women on the Lian Mountain pass bordering Kandep and Laiagam in 1992.

The pack rapes of the three women was believed to be deliberate and vicious attempts by the youths to spread the deadly AIDS virus.

One of the women was nursing a child when she encountered her ordeal on that cold misty mourning on the isolated mountain pass.
It was suspected that the rapists were the same group that in 1991 had gang-raped a young woman in Laiagam – an AIDS victim who had since died from complications.

At least one of the offenders returned a positive HIV test while others thought to have been involved in the attack did not cooperate with attempts to get them tested by health officials.

In the three sex attacks on the Kandep-Laiagam border the rapists reportedly told their victims during their ordeals that they were deliberately spreading the killer disease so many more people could follow them to the grave: “We do not want to die alone but take as many people as possible with us to the grave. And AIDS must spread to Kandep, Porgera and the rest of Enga.”

Meanwhile, an Aid Post Orderly who was trying to arrange blood tests for the three rape victims from Kandep was claiming compensation for damages from a colleague who threatened him with an axe in a bid to protect the identities of the three women.

The colleague, a relative of the three victims, threatened the orderly for suggesting the three women be taken to hospital for blood tests.

‘I want my friend to compensate me,’ the APO said. “Because the way he swung the axe at me drained all my blood out. He said to me several times – How do you know they have AIDS. But the right thing to do is test them. He threatened me when I tried to do my job.”

The Aidpost Orderly said it was common knowledge and confirmed by police that the three women had been raped by the thugs. And as responsible health workers, he said it was necessary to encourage the victims to go for blood tests to find out if the thugs were carrying the virus and enable the victims to get proper treatment and counselling.

Provincial authorities said the three women did not report their ordeal out of ‘pure embarrassment’ but because of the rapist’s comments and the threat the criminals posed on other women who travelled the Kandep-Laiagam road, the relatives of the three victims decided to report the matter.

Assistant Secretary for Health at the time, Dr Samson Amean said his Disease Control officers had been trying to verify the reports of the alleged rapes but the relatives of the suspects had denied that the same youths had committed the latest atrocities.
Dr Amean said he was most concerned because if the youths were the same thugs involved in the Lian border sex attacks, then their attitude had serious implications for Enga society above and beyond the spread of the fatal disease for which there was no cure.

Tribal wars and demands for compensations will surely follow, the doctor said. And he played a part in the initial stages to legislate a tough new law and he hinted he would recommend the Death Penalty to stop carriers from deliberately spreading the deadly disease.

“When people know they have AIDS and deliberately spread it, its rather inhuman. This can be the equivalent of a murder case,” Dr Amean said. “A tough law should be legislated.”

“In America, they have a law. A man who deliberately spread the disease there and was caught was put behind bars for life. It should also happen here.”

Dr Amean could not reveal or confirm reports that names of some Enga politicians were included on a long list of 71 people named by four female confirmed AIDS victims who had had sexual relations with them. Two of the carriers died – one of whom was the woman raped in Laiagam by the Kandep-Laiagam border criminals in 1991.

Dr Amean said he was appealing to the 71 people and others involved in sexual activity to go for blood tests at Sopas Provincial Hospital and Mambisanda Lutheran Hospital to prevent them from passing the virus onto other people.

“If they do not go for tests, we could end up like some African countries where the AIDS epidemic started in urban centres and crept into villages where the disease was deeply entrenched,” he said.

The African country of Uganda has a population of over 16 million people, Dr Amean said of whom over 1.5 million people were estimated to be HIV positive.

“This sort of situation must be prevented now in PNG, a relatively small country. Cooperation is needed from everybody to fight the disease,” Dr Amean said.

Many years later the women of Konoagil in New Ireland province decided enough was enough and openly expressed outrage that rape, incest, wife bashing and under-age pregnancy was rampant in their area.
At the same time a local non-government organisation, Root of Change, reported that community leaders treated rape and other serious sex related crimes as family affairs and turned a blind eye to them.

It’s a serious situation and the Konoagil women were not alone in their agony.

Thousands of other women across PNG continued to suffer all forms of violence including shocking soccery-related horrific burning deaths and torture which were posted on social media and headline news around the world.

Even male students - educated to a level where they should know better - were involved in abusing fellow students.

Most victims never reported their ordeal to police for fear of stigma and discrimination. Nor did most victims of sexual attacks go to hospital for medical examination, treatment and counselling.

Quite apart from the often severe physical and psychological trauma involved, this abuse is fertile ground for contracting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

The PNG government developed a handbook explaining exactly what people should do if they had been sexually abused and, as a result, contracted HIV/AIDS. There were also legal remedies offered through the HIV/AIDS Management and Prevention Act, 2003.

A civil action can be brought in either the district or the national court. The first step is to get advice from a lawyer. If people do not have the money, it may be possible to get help from the Public Solicitor or from NGOs such as the Individual and Community Rights Advocacy Forum.

The district court can award damages or compensation up to a maximum of K10,000. More than this, action needs to be taken in the national court.

Court cases held under these provisions must be held in camera, which means that only the affected people and court personnel can be in the court. The public and the media are not allowed in the courtroom.

At the time of writing, no victim in Enga Province had used the provisions of the HIV/AIDS Act, perhaps because they did not yet know of its existence or understood the procedures. But many victims had lodged complaints at weekly Operation Mekim Save joint village court sittings in Wabag town.
That said, the village court magistrates did not appear to operate in accordance with the Act but made decisions to defuse situations that would potentially lead to tribal warfare or cause further discontent.

Enga already witnessed the first HIV/AIDS-related tribal war - which claimed the lives of more than 20 young men and destroyed schools and other property costing thousands of kina.

The fight started when a woman tested HIV positive after her husband forced her to do a blood test when he heard rumors she had been unfaithful to him when he was away in Port Moresby. The fight began during an argument as the husband tried to divorce his wife and tried to recover some of his bride price.

While aggrieved persons should not resort to violence because laws are in place to address these problems, the authorities have a mammoth task to ensure the right information is made available to empower women, most of whom live in remote areas, to protect their rights and advance in life.

The most important women in a man’s life the world over are - his mother, his wife and his daughter.

A mother is somebody’s daughter and so is a wife. They were loved dearly by their parents and relatives as much as men love their own children.

Women and girls are not meant to be abused and intimidated but need to be treated decently and left alone to enjoy their lives. This is a universal concern of all parents.

In 1985, my wife had spent a sleepless night after witnessing my cousin’s pregnant wife mercilessly raped at Five Mile in Port Moresby when I lived on campus at the University of Papua New Guinea.

Port Moresby was safe when I was a student at Idubada Technical College in 1975, the year PNG attained independence.

But when I returned ten years later with my wife and our first child, serious crime, particularly sexual attacks on women, had reached unprecedented levels.

The night the rascals came, my wife was nursing our second child (now a teacher and mother of three beautiful children). My wife had been discharged from the Port Moresby General Hospital just that day. The lights were on in the room she shared with my cousin’s mother. The two other bedrooms were occupied by my cousin’s two wives.
My wife and aunt watched helplessly as the criminals carried our suitcases away with all our belongings. The only man in the house was overpowered at gunpoint. There were no locks on the doors, except the one occupied by my cousin’s newly-wed second wife, which had a deadlock. She was terrified but safe inside.

My cousin’s eight month pregnant first wife was the unlucky one. She was assaulted by several men. She had to be treated for trauma at Port Moresby General Hospital that morning. Two days later she gave birth to a healthy son.

The criminals involved were never caught. Relatives came and helped trace the suspects to a nearby squatter settlement in East Boroko but the police showed no interest in following up on the lead.

The men in blue too often appeared indifferent to attacks on women. Even some policemen were accused of abusing prisoners held in the country’s detention centres.

No female, national or foreign, was safe - they were all potential targets. Port Moresby, Mt Hagen and Lae became the rape centres of the country but over the years the phenomenon spread to all corners.

Once safe places like Madang and Popondetta became hazardous. In Popondetta, a Sepik mother of five was seized from her husband and children in their own house, raped repeatedly and killed.

In Rabaul, a 10-year old girl from Gaulim village was treated for serious internal injuries at Nonga Base Hospital after a 46 year old man from the neighboring village of Rapitola had raped her.

In Enga Province, a girl of about 17 from Kandep was raped in Wapenamanda and killed. The assailants disfigured her face beyond recognition. No suspect was caught but the people from the village where she resided paid customary compensation.

“It is no longer safe to live in towns like Lae even with the joint police and defence force anti-crime operations,” said Mrs Kila Averi after a foreign female helicopter pilot, Heather Mitchell, was savagely raped and murdered in the city in September 1987.

At the time, Sister Rita Hassett of the Family Life Office at Sangurap Catholic Mission in Wabag organized a seminar to gauge views from women and girls to find out what the government should do about the constant attacks.
The 400 participants, mainly girls from youth groups, vocational centers and high schools, said tougher penalties must be introduced to address these vicious attacks.

Some girls suggested tough punishments like the death penalty. Others said rapists should be castrated or maimed by cutting off one of their legs to immobilise them for life.

Many decades later violence against women persisted in many parts of PNG with no sign of abating.

Just when the final draft of this book was being finalized an American tourist from Los Angeles was raped and two of her fingers chopped to the bone on the famous World War II Kokoda track on Monday morning, 11th January, 2016.

Michelle Clemens from Los Angeles and her London-based male partner Mathew Iovane both 31 claimed they were beaten, stripped naked and blindfolded using their own tee shirts before leading them into the jungle and abused. Mathew was allegedly tied to a tree while Michelle was raped.

‘As far as I am concerned, if I have my way, I'll have all these criminals that raped this innocent woman castrated. They don’t deserve to live,’ said Justin Thatchenko on national EMTV news. “The situation is that she had a horrific experience that will leave a scare on her mind for the rest of her life.”

Thatchenko had just been appointed new minister for tourism and he was very upset that his job was made all the more difficult especially when the incident happened at a major tourist destination in the country.

Villagers apprehended two suspects from the area and handed them over to the police. The two suspects were believed to be brothers aged 16 and 19. Police were interrogating them at 15 mile outside Port Moresby to find out why they had attacked the couple.

Two weeks after the incident, villagers complained that the two trekkers had shown disrespect and treated the people as if they were still living in the stoneage.

Kokoda Corridor Central side chairman Philip Batia said the lack of respect shown by the two had the villagers along the trail hiding their faces in shame for indecent sexual acts. Village elders referred to them as not human but masalais (spirits).

‘They kissed, hugged and at times walked half naked on the trail in the presence of their porter,’ Mr Batia said. ‘At Efogi village, they
were caught getting sexual and were asked by a youth leader to use a house if they were feeling the need to have sex.

‘They were touching and holding each other in front of the villagers, including children, and then they moved behind a house before they were asked to use a house in the village. On two sections of the village, the pair had sex and walked naked from Efogi to the 1900 campsite.

‘Their acts are considered abusive and are contrary to the cultural beliefs the locals on the trail are used to. I can honestly say they were acting like dogs,’ Mr Batia told the PNG Post Courier.

Although the people condoned the attack they wanted everyone to know the truth about how the couple had treated the villagers – ‘as if we were still primitives.’

Eleven days before the Kokoda Track attack, four women were pack raped in the Port Moresby suburb of Morata on New Years Eve by a group of about 20 men. The victims included two teenagers, aged 15, a 23 year old woman and a 40 year old. They were sleeping in their house when they were attacked in the night. No arrests were made by police.

A couple of years ago, an American academic was raped on Karkar Island in Madang where she was researching exotic birds. Her husband and their guide were striped naked and tied to a tree by nine thugs armed with bush knives and guns. They then hacked off the 32 year old woman’s blond hair and gang raped for 20 minutes.

Prime Minister Peter O’Neill condemned the attack on the academic as 'the cowardly act of animals'. These sort of attacks on local and foreign women did not help the country’s image - perpetrated by a few criminals. The majority of peace-loving citizens of PNG continued to endure the shame, humiliation and condemnation from the world’s tabloids like London’s Sun newspaper which first reported the Kokoda incident with damning descriptions of the people.

What sort of a law would stop perputrators – a law that ordinary citizens would want the PNG Parliament to enact?

According to a Sunni hadith, the punishment for committing rape is death, there is no sin on the victim, nor is there any worldly punishment ascribed to her. Most scholars treat rape as hirabah (disorder in the land).
Isn’t there disorder in PNG with wanton sexual attacks on defenceless women - both foreign and national alike?

Perhaps Justin Thatchenko should really consider having his own way and introduce tough legislations like the death penalty. But will this help?

A Catholic nun in Wabag, Sr. Miriam Diugosz, who was in Papua New Guinea for three years, was concerned for the safety of women when rape was a common occurrence in the 1980s.

“If virginity is offered as a gift then that leads to happiness,” Sr. Diugosz said. “Men must understand the hurt a woman suffers after she has been raped, which is very painful. It is the last thing a woman wants done to her.

“Rape is committed by men who are angry. They want to release their tensions on a weaker creature. But a woman is gentle, men need to know that.”

At the time in the mid 80s my wife and our two young children lived in safety on campus – away from Five Mile after witnessing the rape of my cousin’s pregnant wife - until I completed my studies. The UPNG administration, under Vice Chancellor, late Dr. Elton Brash, was kind enough to provide us with married accommodation.

Many years later, I was able to show two of my children where we used to live when they enrolled at the university in different years.

Each time, it brought back all those memories and echoes of the anxieties of that time.
Defeating the Culture of Corruption in PNG: Will ICAC Do It? And a National Court Judge warns Against Complacency

Opposition leader Don Polyte described the K14.76 billion 2016 Papua New Guinea budget as “another hoax” aimed at enriching contractors at the expense of the people and said the wealth of the country was “segregated to one side”.

“It does not increase the per capita income of the people,” Polyte said. “Look at the current trend for infrastructure. The only people enjoying this luxury, with so much wealth concentrated in Port Moresby, are only four or five companies. Multi-million kina contracts are already decided at the top level.”

Polyte said decisions went to these contractors without competitive bidding. This was evident before the recent Pacific Games in Port Moresby and would also be seen for APEC 2018.

Polyte’s accusation seemed to bear out what long-time businessman, Sir Ramon Thurecht, said publicly in 2008 - that the going rate for awarding these lucrative contracts was a 30% cut in the deal.

Thurecht revealed how shameful it was for a syndicate of bureaucrats and politicians to beg for ‘their’ 30% before work would be awarded.

It was a national shame. No politician or bureaucrat stepped forward to defend this serious accusation.

The very people who were entrusted to steer PNG forward did not choose to respond to a charge that they were involved in deep rooted corruption.
“Our biggest challenge now is to work with the government,” said Thurecht, at the time chairman of the PNG Manufacturers Council. “Unfortunately, with the graft and corruption that is permeated in both the bureaucracy and the political level, it is extremely difficult if you win a contract to get your money.”

Thurecht said many businesses could not speak out because they feared the bureaucrats and politicians would retaliate.

It was a warning not to be ignored. Crime and corruption has already driven some of the highly skilled and well-educated people out of PNG - a number are now working in Australia.

There were honest, hardworking, sincere and committed bureaucrats and politicians but, if they care about the future of PNG, they need to speak out against this cancer that has crept deep into the core of society.

From a K50 ‘lunch money’ attached to something like a passport application to lifestyles way beyond the means of bureaucrats and politicians, it appears no normal business will be done in PNG without a ‘gift’ changing hands.

A trainee teacher told me that some lecturers accepted bribes to give ‘A’ or ‘B’ grades to students.

He said graft was so prevalent at his institution that former Grade 10 and 12 students with low marks had been accepted to train as teachers. And these people were admitted at the expense of Grade 12 students with high marks.

Why is corruption so deep rooted in Papua New Guinea, Africa and Asia?

One of the most widely cited factors is the low salaries of civil servants according to Jon Quah, a professor of political science at the University of Singapore.

“Inadequate wages force public servants to accept ‘speed money’ to expedite citizens’ requests for services or bribes to bend the rules for people not eligible for permits or benefits,” he said.

The expansive role of governments in national development also increases opportunities for administrative discretion and corruption.

There also tends to be a low risk of detection and punishment. Civil services suffer from weak controls and employees see graft as a low-risk, high-reward activity.

The fourth factor fostering rampant corruption in many developing countries is culture - as in PNG with ‘wantokism’, closely
knit family or clan groupings and traditions of gift giving open the door for public officials to perform favours for relatives.

But the most important reason for extensive corruption in many developing countries is a lack of political will to do anything about it, combined with ineffective anti-corruption strategies.

The O’Neill-Dion government passed a new law on the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), an anti-corruption body that will address the issue of corruption at all levels.

The ICAC is a legal body headed by a commissioner. It is tasked to minimise or even eradicate graft and corruption altogether in PNG.

Effective anti-corruption strategies may include paying public servants adequate salaries, reducing opportunities for corruption by removing unnecessary regulation, improving supervision of civil servants in vulnerable positions and increasing the probability of detecting and punishing corrupt individuals.

But the most important strategy is to improve morality within the ranks of senior politicians and bureaucrats.

Remember, the fish starts to rot from the head.

Papua New Guinea will face disastrous consequences in ten to twenty years’ time if people continued to be complacent - if they continued to think everything is going to be alright, the late Justice Moses Jalina warned in early 2007.

The Wabag resident judge said during Legal Year celebrations that like the snake biting deep into a man’s body and depositing deadly venom into the bloodstream, the country was already riddled with crime and widespread corruption in high places.

“People are thinking everything is okay,” Jalina said. “But in 10-20 years’ time, PNG will not be the same. Police are just watching crimes being committed.”

He said the media was full of stories on allegations of corruption in high places but it does not get anywhere - nobody took any action.

But in places like Australia, once corruption is exposed in the media, law enforcement agencies take immediate action until people see justice being done.

“Here police are not arresting law breakers. Un-roadworthy vehicles are even allowed to be driven around, they are not arresting them.” Jalina said.

He told the Provincial Police Commander not to allow uniformed
policemen and women to drive unscrupulous Asians around and to check that they were not being bribed.

Justice Jalina appealed to people to become whistle blowers and make police aware of crimes being committed so arrests can be made and free the country of serious crime and corruption.

Justice Jalina warned that if people just stood by and allowed foreigners to mess with the police force, the people themselves will end up losers. “Like the Ela Motors advertisement goes: ‘When the going gets tough, the tough get going’. And when the going gets tough, the tough foreigners will pack up and leave. You and I will remain here.”

Governor Peter Ipatas agreed that the judge was right and that the people had become really complacent.

“And if it wasn’t for the judiciary, the country could have long disintegrated because leaders have brought the country down to its knees. And the government had failed the country,” Ipatas said, “and it really needed to review the judicial system to ensure security and conditions of judges to allow for them to continue to uphold the law.”

He said, “Everybody, the government, police, public servants must take stock now and take proactive roles to uphold the laws of this country.

“When you see judges, the police and the court system, you must ask yourselves why they are here?” Ipatas said.

“I just don’t know why this country is surviving when I see law and order breaking down everywhere,” he said.

In order to fight crime, the Enga Provincial Government had done its part to recognize Village Court officials, establish the National Court in Wabag and promised to support Legal Year celebrations in Wabag every year.

The legal year was celebrated every year where judges, lawyers magistrates, policemen, CIS officers and staff from the legal fraternity gathered to celebrate and speak about how best the law can be upheld in the country.

But serious crime continued. Police were under-resourced and could not make any arrests in the cold-blooded murder of Jack Nema the president of Yengis Local Level Government in Kompiam district.

Nema was killed while negotiating the surrender of murder
suspects - one of whom was suspected of killing a church health worker’s daughter. Two men reportedly fired two guns in unison at close range – one on each side of the president and ended his life.

Nema had served as a councillor for over 25 years. He was appointed president in 1986 until 2006 when he served as Chairman of Agriculture, Commerce and Tourism in the Enga Provincial Assembly. He was killed on 22nd March, 2006.

Five years later, in another bizarre case, no suspect was captured in connection with the daylight disappearance of five young research scientists off the coast of West New Britain.
The Mysterious Disappearance of the Five Goroka Scientists

Two significant events occurred on the first two days of August 2011 which are indelibly recorded in the history books of Papua New Guinea.

On 1 August, five research scientists, two boat’s crew and one other person disappeared off the coast of Kimbe in West New Britain.

On 2 August, the Somare-Abal led national government was toppled paving the way for Peter O’Neill to become Prime Minister.

In the middle of the political high jinx and Sir Michael Somare being seriously ill in a Singapore Hospital, there was not a lot of attention given to the scientists’ disappearance, even when the news broke a week later.

The morning was cloudy when the researchers boarded a banana boat at Milimata to go to Bali Island near Talasea in West New Britain. They were researching malaria-related diseases.

The group included two young women, Tania Oakiva from Gulf Province and Lydia Petrus from Ialibu in the Southern Highlands.

The other scientists were team leader Gibson Gideon from Enga, Leonard Vavana from East New Britain and George Dogoya from the Eastern Highlands. They all worked at the Goroka-based Institute of Medical Research.

They were never seen or heard from again and the banana boat was found floating off the East Sepik coast many months later.
Tania Oakiva was single and Lydia Petrus was married to Roy Philia from Enga. Gibson Gideon left behind a six month baby girl. Leonard Vavana was the father of two small boys and a small girl. George Dogoya left behind two wives with three young children.

The other three missing people were a passenger believed to be a relative of Gibson Gideon while Peter Divu and Bombong Patella, both from Bali Island, were the boat’s crew.

The banana boat belonged to Paul Lakovai, a provincial health officer who was in charge of organising travel and equipment for the scientists.

On 8 August, Maso Raka Oakiva, the elder sister of Tania, broke the news to the media after hearing from a friend that the scientists had vanished.

At the time, Maso said Tania had sent a text message between 12pm and 1pm on 2 August requesting K20 worth of phone credits.

Maso said authorities did not act fast enough to rescue the scientists or handle leads in a professional manner.

Three weeks after the eight people disappeared, Maso forwarded a disturbing text message to the West New Britain Provincial Police Commander, Thomas Reu.

The message demanded K1,000 worth of phone credits and K10,000 ransom for the release of Tania. The text was a vital clue which indicated that Tania and colleagues were probably still alive but the authorities did not act diligently, refusing the offer of a search helicopter and a float plane owned by Good Samaritan Air.

The West New Britain Provincial Administration called off the search and rescue operation saying they suspected sea piracy, a criminal act requiring police action.

Dr Manuel Hetzel of the Institute of Medical Research longed to know what had happened to his colleagues.

“The most difficult thing for the families and friends of these missing staff is that we do not know what happened to them, we don't know whether they're alive or whether they are dead,” he said.

“We have heard so many rumours, but unfortunately none of these rumours has led us to something. So we're appealing to everybody who knows something to just come forward and at least help us to find some peace of mind.”

The police meanwhile had run out of funds. Provincial Police Commander, Chief Inspector Samson Siguyaru said they needed
more money and sent a request to Police headquarters in Port Moresby. A further K10,000 was provided for police to continue investigations and advertisements were placed in the papers offering K30,000 reward for information related to the whereabouts of the missing people.

Nobody came forward. Maso Oakiva offered K20,000 of her own money to pay ransom to Don Aka, a notorious criminal suspected of involvement in kidnapping the scientists. He was a prison escapee, suspected pirate, drug runner and an accomplice of serial bank robber, William Kapris.

The money was to be paid straight to his father in the village without any questions asked. Still nobody came forward.

Three months later, in early November, the relatives demanded the government provide K500,000 to find out how the team had disappeared.

Action went begging. Nor did the provincial governments of East New Britain, Gulf, Enga, Eastern Highlands and Southern Highlands offer any help to find the people missing in the line of duty.

Team leader Gibson Gideon’s relatives travelled from Wabag to Goroka, erected a tent and used it as a temporary funeral home and stayed there for six months. Relatives of the other missing scientists also built their own tents.

“We thought Gibson and his colleagues would be found alive but as the days went by we lost hope and went back home disappointed,” John Kisa, a first cousin, recalled. He criticised the government for not doing enough in the first place to allocate funding for the search.

“Somebody honest out there knows and saw what really happened from point A to point B,” John Kisa said. “Police could have found an answer a long time ago if investigations had been conducted thoroughly with adequate funds allocated.”

But John Kisa and his relatives returned to Wabag with an empty coffin, which they filled with Gibson Gideon’s personal belongings and buried at Akom village on the Highlands Highway.

After about a year, Prime Minister O’Neill instructed the Attorney General’s Office to set up a coronial inquest which surprisingly concluded, after three months, that the three male scientists were presumed dead and that the two women and the relative of the team leader were either dead or alive.
Coroner Lawrence Kangwia recommended the police immediately set up a fresh investigation team from outside West New Britain to follow-up leads and suspects.

He suggested two possible scenarios as the likely cause of the demise of the missing persons. Bad weather or foul play.

However, the Coroner said the evidence suggested the passengers did not perish in bad weather, pointing to foul play.

The eight people remain missing to this day - and their fate remains one of Papua New Guinea’s greatest unsolved mysteries.

The truth of an old Engan adage ‘the spoken word will remain to haunt or inspire you’ was fulfilled - at least to my interpretation.

The 16-year old words exchanged between ‘soccer men’ the late Joseph Maineke, Mark Yapao and Governor Peter Ipatas during the National Women’s Soccer Tournament in Wabag were now relevant.

“Through sports we want to mend ourselves and foster friendship and struggle for unity and long lasting peace on Bougainville,” Joe Maineke said soon after his arrival in Wabag in August 1998.

At the time he was the coach of the Bougainville women’s soccer team which had travelled all the way from the war-torn island to participate in the soccer tournament in Highlands Enga.

Tears came to the eyes of many officials and players when these words were repeated again by Mark Yapao, president of the Enga Soccer Association, at the farewell dinner in Wapenamanda.

“Yes, coach, you expressed it well. I want to let you know that all of PNG, especially us, the Enga people, are with you in your struggle and we love you all,” Yapao said. “Everlasting peace can be achieved through active participation in sport.”

A couple of days earlier, Governor Peter Ipatas had expressed similar sentiments when he officially welcomed the nine women’s soccer teams to his province. Players, officials and spectators stood solemnly at the Peter Mommers Soccer Oval in Wabag when the Governor expressed his feelings for Bougainville.

“I have the people of Bougainville in my heart,” he said. “We in Enga share your problems. I want you to know that you are always welcome to come to this province at any time.”

And he applauded the team for making it to Enga after nine years of struggle, pain, loss of life and property on Bougainville.

“Some may not welcome you, but we in Enga do. You are always welcome here. And Engans who made Bougainville their home
before the crisis are ready to come back and help rebuild the province with you,” he said.

Enga people do not make such remarks for nothing - action must follow. So like a true son of Enga, Ipatas announced he would assist the Bougainville soccer team with a donation of K2,000 to alleviate travel costs.

He apologised to the other eight teams saying he had to give something to the Bougainville team because they had suffered for many years. There was obvious wanbel and understanding on the faces of other team members and officials.

Post-Courier journalist Romulus Masiu’s superb profile of Joe Maineke and stories on PNG Attitude kept nagging at me that I must have met Joe somewhere in Enga Province.

I have in my house a grass skirt from Bougainville given to Governor Peter Ipatas as a parting gift by the officials and players. Ipatas gave the skirt to me as a memento of that memorable night filled with compassion and laughter. It was a moment of true peace and unity.

I hung the grass skirt on the wall in our living room. It has remained there to this day. But I wanted to find out if Joe had been on that trip to Enga Province.

So I searched my Enga Nius files which, like the Arawa Bulletin, is our provincial newspaper. I helped to establish it in 1983 and edited it for 25 years until mid-2008.

Sure enough the front page story on 31 August 1998 was about Governor Peter Ipatas welcoming the Bougainville Woman’s Soccer team to the province. The accompanying photograph of some dancing girls from Bougainville came alive.

Governor Ipatas had postponed his trip to Port Moresby for the Parliamentary session to farewell the nine teams and make the cash presentation to the Bougainville team.

When the Governor made the presentation, Joe Maineke said he was receiving it on behalf of the Bougainville Transitional Government and the soccer team.

He said progress was being made to stop the problems on the island and Governor Ipatas as a member of Parliament was aware of the situation. He said he would bring another team to Enga if there was another opportunity in the future.
Then the late Joe Maineke and his girls sang their provincial anthem and other songs and danced to the delight of a packed crowd of players, officials and some shy Engans who had never seen Bougainvillean girls dancing.

After the performance, the team gave the grass skirt and a headdress of colourful feathers as a parting gift to Governor Peter Ipatas, and this is what he gave me later as a memento of the fun-filled night.

In 2015 when I started writing this book, the people from the Autonomous Region of Bougainville were going to the polls to elect a new president and new members to their Parliament.

President John Momis was reelected to his post and he will take the people to a referendum to decide their future – to stick with PNG or break away.

It is fitting that the words of late Joseph Maineke spoken during the National Woman’s Soccer Tournament in Wabag be etched forever in gold.

“Through sports we want to mend ourselves and foster friendship and struggle for unity and long lasting peace on Bougainville.”
Predicted in a Dream: Death of Wabag MP – Takai Kapi & Murder and Lifestyle Disease Depletes PNG’s Shining Stars

It’s a heart-wrenching tale of the brief ascent to power, downfall and death of Takai Kapi, the former Member of Parliament for Wabag electorate.

And it was all predicted in a dream - not by a fortune teller or a village magician but by a respected chartered accountant, Larsen Levi.

Levi is a graduate of the PNG University of Technology. He had a Bachelor of Arts in Accounting. He encouraged the late Kapi to stand for election in 1997 because he saw him win in a vivid dream which turned out to be true.

Kapi had graduated from the University of PNG with a BA in Political Science in 1996. At age 25, he was too young and lacked experience. He hadn’t yet grown the tough hide required to withstand the challenges and complexities of modern day politics.

Levi relates the poignant tale from beginning to end.

“In my dream, I was about to cross a river after a big thunder storm. I stood on the bank wondering how I would negotiate the flooded river. Then I saw a tree with its bark freshly removed felled across the raging river. It was the only way to the other side. The log was very slippery but when I stepped on it my feet firmly gripped the slippery surface. I found it very easy to walk across.

“I saw Paias Wingti on the other side clearing land to make new gardens, sweat flowing down his long beard, while Sir Rabbie
Namaliu, Sir Mekere Mourata, Bill Skate and others were coming down the path to cross the river together.

“I became aware that I was on my way to Parliament. Along the way Paul Torato gave me a business card with Bill Skate’s name printed at the top in capital letters. Takai Kapi’s name was also written in small type at the bottom.

“I woke up in a good mood and knew Bill Skate would win and become Prime Minister. I knew Takai Kapi would win too. My dream proved to be true.”

As soon as Kapi was declared winner in Wabag, they drove through the night to Levi’s house in Mt Hagen. Next day Paias Wingti and other newly elected members of Parliament drove into the yard and requested to see Kapi.

“We lied, saying that he was not in the house,” Levi said. “Immediately after Wingti left, Peter O’Neill and the late Fr Robert Lak came. Peter O’Neill was my classmate at Unitech so he did not hesitate to enter my house. He searched but could not find Kapi, who was hiding in a cupboard in our bedroom.”

Kapi did not emerge until the pair left the premises.

Later that day, Rimbink Pato rang from Port Moresby and directed Kapi and Levi to go to Kagamuga Airport next morning and board a light aircraft that would take them to Kiburu Lodge near Mendi in the Southern Highlands.

Kapi and Levi were foolhardy. They changed the flight plan and first took the plane to Maramuni to thank the people, assuring them that the Wabag Open seat was now firmly in their hands.

“Instead of going direct to Mendi we flew to Maramuni,” Levi said. “On the way back we picked up Rex Paki at Wapenamanda to accompany us to Mendi but the pilot said we were low on fuel so we flew back to Mt Hagen. As soon as we landed, Tom Amaiu forced his way into the plane and grabbed Takai Kapi’s hands and dragged him out.

“I thought Tom wanted to tell him something important. But the way Takai was pulled out indicated otherwise. I saw him hastily being carried past the parking lot. I rushed out of the plane.

“Takai was a little man and it was very easy for Amaiu to literally carry him. I did not even think of explaining the situation to the pilot as I rushed out in fear for his safety,” Levi recalled.
He saw Kapi being driven off in a vehicle at high speed. Levi was abandoned at the airport feeling empty, miserable and sick. Later that night Kapi was driven home in good shape and Levi’s heart beat returned to normal.

Next day Rimbink Pato and Rex Paki rang them and directed them to board an Air Niugini flight to Port Moresby. Mr Paki had flown to Port Moresby after he witnessed Kapi being dragged from the plane.

The young first time Parliamentarian from Maramuni was in for more shock as soon as they landed at Jackson’s International Airport. Levi recalls how they were abducted.

“Three men held us up at gun point and shoved us into a waiting car which sped out of the access gate between the domestic and international terminals. We were in total shock and did not know what was happening to us. Next instant we found ourselves at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. They shepherded us into a room on one of the top floors.

“More men came and they gave us a loaded pistol and told us to shoot any intruder that entered. I had never used a gun in my life and it was scary. They assumed we knew how to use it and left the loaded pistol with us. Everything happened so fast as if in a dream.

“Anything we needed was provided for us on call. But we spent a terrifying night wondering who our attackers might be. Early next morning we heard a knock on the door and our exhausted bodies tensed with fear and anxiety.

“When we heard Sir Michael Somare’s voice, we relaxed a bit and opened the door. Now we knew our kidnappers had been sent by Pangu Party officials. The Chief greeted us warmly and asked us to prepare to leave immediately. Down in the foyer we mingled with other men with anxious faces.

“We were directed to board buses which drove us straight to the airport. From there we boarded an Air Niugini F28 jet which landed us in Wewak and settled into the Windjammer Beach Resort hotel. Later we were given a car to explore the East Sepik Province. We drove to Angoram and saw how close it was for Enga Province to be connected by road to the coast.”

But as Levi slept in the Windjammer Resort hotel in Wewak, he had another disturbing vision in which he saw the downfall of Kapi.
When he interpreted it, Kapi was visibly distressed and did not concentrate for most of that day.

It turned out, in reality, that Takai Kapi’s election win was to be disqualified by the Supreme Court, which ordered a by-election.

Daniel Kapi, the first runner-up, had challenged Takai Kapi’s win on the basis he was not qualified to nominate and stand for election. His name was not on the common roll as required by law.

His name, which had been on the previous 1992 common roll, was missing from the revised 1997 roll.

Back in Port Moresby, Bill Skate formed government. Later, Takai Kapi crossed the floor and joined his ranks but nobody welcomed him. Kapi’s services were not needed now.

There was much more litigation, some of it very complex, but, in the end, for the luckless Takai Kapi, the Wabag Open seat had escaped him.

It was a devastating blow. The relentless pressure that built up on him from the day of his election win to his failed court challenges and his loss in the by-election was too much to bear.

Gradually his health failed and he died a frustrated young man, full of remorse and anger. His passing left more than 12,000 Maramuni people heart broken.

Also sad is this other tale, in fact, it’s a complete nightmare - a family line ended with the death of its last surviving male in 1998.

This is the story of how young professionals in Enga Province and, indeed, all of Papua New Guinea, die as a result of lifestyle disease and cold blooded murder.

Rocky Neokuli was a well-known young businessman who died soon after admission to Port Moresby General Hospital. A relative said he had been nursing wounds for three or four days at his home in the suburb of Morata, thinking they were minor.

Rocky had sustained the injuries during a fight at Nine Mile. He was taken too late to the hospital and died there as soon as he was admitted.

Two men and two women were arrested by police and detained. Rocky Neokuli’s last act had been to identify them.

Rocky was about 30 and from Birip village in Kompiam, Enga Province. He was single, the only child of a family which broke up when he was very young.
He grew up under his father’s care and attended Wabag Secondary School. But his father was killed in a tribal war before Rocky completed his education.

He was the only boy who could carry on the family name. But there was no hope for that now, as he was dead. Wabag residents would remember him as a busy enterprising young man who operated the upstairs Pokies House in the town.

People wept openly when Rocky’s body was driven around the closed Pokies House for a few minutes. People chanted ‘mendaiakali, mendaiakali’ meaning only child, as the funeral procession proceeded to Birip village in Kompiam for burial.

Engans in Port Moresby contributed a substantial amount of money to transport the body home. People from Laiagam who lived there contributed K2,000 and, when the body arrived at Kagamuga Airport, a further K1,000 was given by Laiagam people who lived in Mt Hagen.

The untimely death of Rocky Neokuli added to a long list of young educated Enga people who die in the prime of their lives. This depletion of young professionals puts a huge strain on the workforce of Enga and PNG.

Also from the Ambum Kompiam electorate in Enga province was Public Service Commissioner Waka Busa who was killed in a car crash in the night together with a relative who had just graduated from the University of PNG. They were transporting guests to their homes after the graduation party in Port Moresby when the tragic incident occurred.

Still in the Ambum Valley in February 1995 a senior high school teacher, Henry Kuakam the father of two young children was killed instantly when the driver of the vehicle he was sitting in lost control and plunged over a cliff. Eight other passengers were critically injured.

Before that on March 8, 1994, a senior correctional officer, Damson Rawal, 45 from Teremanda village died of a heart attack. He was survived by his wife Maria from Western Highlands and son Paul, 20.

Leading female lawyer, Susan Balen, a young mother of two children from Irelya village in Wabag, died after a long illness. Her husband, Roy Kisau, also a lawyer, had died a couple of years earlier.
At about the time Susan died, businessman Martin Tokapae of Birip in Wabag passed away. And before Martin’s death, Londati Minapi, a well-known rugby player who represented the country in the Kumuls national rugby league team died suddenly in Port Moresby.

He passed away just as his Yakale clan of Keas village was in mourning for the death of local businessman, Mas Puli. They were preparing the funeral feast when Londati Minapi’s body was flown home from Port Moresby for burial.

Another Enga Kumul legend to die was James Tengen of Irelya, who was stricken by a heart attack at the home of American Christian friends, Monica and Mark Gonzales from the city of St Antonio in Texas. He was in America to seek treatment for a hip problem sustained in a vehicle accident. He was treated and able to walk freely but died when he was about to return home.

These deaths keep adding to a long list of other young Enga lawyers, civil servants, businessman and other professionals who have suddenly died in the prime of their lives.

The first Enga lawyer and PNG Ambassador to Fiji, Kopi Kepore died in Suva following a heart attack while playing golf.

Private lawyer Jerry Maeokali died of a heart attack after suffering chest pains on a routine trip to Wabag from Port Moresby.

“When a man is alive on this earth, you can fight with him, argue with him, hate him but when he is dead, all is gone,” is how former Governor Jeffery Balakau responded after he heard about the death of Mr Maeokali.

Jeffery’s brother, Malipu Balakau, also a lawyer, had been brutally killed 10 years previously and his story is told separately here.

Many other lawyers have also died: Joseph Pakau and Ale Kipalan both from Teremanda, Simili Alonke from Alowaip village in Kandep and Reme Rea from Kusi village in Laiagam.

Businessman Seth Timanao was killed at a road block on the Hagen-Enga border. Also killed at a roadblock was Leo Kende, a popular PNG weightlifter and businessman from the Ambum Valley and his Pacific Island wife. They were reportedly killed in revenge after the murder of two University of Technology engineering students in a drunken brawl in Lae.

Former, Enga Administrator, Andersen Aipit died of a heart attack in his village at Kaipale in Laiagam in 2007. Two very senior
Magistrates Patrick Nasa and Avo Kapo also from the area died. While Nasa died of an heart attack, Kapo was murdered at Ela Beach in Port Moresby.

And from nearby Sirunki village, senior PNG Electoral Commission official, Oponeakali Tiene just disappeared from a hotel in Simbu province. Nobody knows of his fate.

Policemen have also been targets of murderers. Inspector Peter Pyaso from Kandep was murdered in the remote Lapalama area of Kompiam when he and his mobile squad flew in to stop a tribal fight in 1992. A year later, another Enga-based policeman, Robin Miria 23 was killed on Bougainville. From Delena village in Bereina in Central province, Miria was attached to the Mobil Squad in Wabag.

Moria was killed at 9:30am by a Bougainville Revolutionary Army (BRA) sniper when he was digging a bunker on Wednesday 29th, September, 1993 at Rumba in Bougainville. Most of his comrades were on patrol when he died from loss of blood.

UPNG commerce graduate, Ami Liu, the mother of three children was killed after allegations she was having an affair with the husband of the coastal woman who knifed her.

In another murder after a twisted love affair, Lundutta Betoma of Yaibos was killed by his wife on the veranda of their Aipus home in Wabag. Lundutta, a UPNG graduate, was accused by his wife of extramarital affairs and she stabbed him.

Philip Kipakali, yet another UPNG graduate from Teremanda village, was killed in Port Moresby during an argument in his own house.

Also killed in Port Moresby was Peter Tum, a senior business development officer from Kepela in Laiagam district. He was killed by raskols when he went to buy buai at a roadside market at Kaugere in the evening.

Roman Catholic priests Fr Lawrence Kambao and Fr Paul Langer died from heart attacks as well as Rollen Alo Kombe, a helicopter pilot from Lemben village in Kompiam district. And the list keeps on growing long every year.

People can avoid heart attacks by looking after themselves, says the Mt Hagen-based private surgeon, Dr Allan Kulunga.

“We are thinking about other people and not looking after ourselves,” Dr Kulunga says. “We are eating anything. People should avoid eating greasy foods and must start to eat lots of fresh market foods.”
produce.” The doctor was right. Lifestyle diseases were claiming a lot of young Papua New Guineans and a breakdown in law and order also saw many of the country’s young educated elites mercilessly killed.

It is saddening to note that the first kiaps, missionaries, teachers and others who came to Enga province in the fifties and sixties are still alive in their 80s or more and look at us dying in the prime of our lives!

To top off all the deaths and murders of educated elites was the assassination of an Engan national government minister.
Dream Unfulfilled: the Political Career of Enga’s Malipu Balakau

One evening in 1989, Papua New Guinea’s Minister for Communications, Malipu Balakau, died from an assassin’s bullet in front of his Mt Hagen home in Newtown.

His aim to become the first Prime Minister from the Highlands region was shattered but an enduring statement he made seven years earlier still reverberates throughout Enga Province.

Malipu Balakau was a promising young lawyer cum politician who attracted large crowds everywhere he went. A gifted public orator, he spoke precisely and clearly on issues.

Balakau, from the Kokope tribe in Wabag, was no ordinary student at St Paul’s Lutheran High School in Wapenamanda.

He had a well-developed mind which was already set on future goals and he appeared to understand a lot of things. He was easily elected by the student body to be their Student Representative Council President.

Fellow student Elias Awarin recalls how one Sunday afternoon in April 1972 Balakau surprised his friends by saying he would be Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea one day.

“We sat telling stories and Malipu surprised us all by saying he would be Prime Minister of PNG one day,” said Awarin. “We all looked at each other and then at him in disbelief because he was only a Grade 8 student. We did not know what he was talking about.”

While most of the students concentrated on their school work, Balakau was actively involved in political activities. During the 1972
national elections, he distributed leaflets for the United Party with the slogan ‘United we stand, divided we fall.’

As president of the Student Representative Council (SRC), he organised the first student protest against the headmaster in 1974, a strike that nearly ended his path to higher education.

When PNG attained independence in 1975, Balakau was studying law at the University of PNG. During his spare time, he interpreted the new Constitution for Sir Tei Abal and other illiterate Parliamentarians from the Highlands region.

In 1976, he founded the United Party branch at UPNG, the first to operate at a tertiary institution. The following year he spearheaded election campaigns for Enga regional member Paul Torato and Wabag MP Sir Tei Abal.

But his involvement with United Party came to an end when Sir Tei did not accept nomination of himself as the United Party candidate for Prime Minister in 1977. Instead he offered the nomination to Sir John Guise in a bid to stop the Papuans breaking away. This caused the United Party, the largest political grouping in the country, to split in two.

“I had pressured Sir Tei to accept nomination of himself and not Sir John Guise but I was disappointed when he bluntly refused,” Balakau said. “We could have had the first Highlands Prime Minister in 1977.”

Frustrated, Balakau launched the Highlands United Front (HUF) at UPNG in September 1977.

By early March the next year, HUF merged with a splinter group from the United Party which changed its name to the National Party. The late Sir Iambaky Okuk became its first Parliamentary leader.

Between 1978 and 1979, Balakau was SRC president at UPNG, escalating a series of crippling strikes and student protests against the national government led by Sir Michael Somare.

“The protests were engineered to soften the Somare government’s grip on power,” Balakau said. The government finally fell in 1980.

“Many Parliamentarians boasted about the downfall but somebody had to be the engineer or the architect,” he said.

In 1982, Balakau stood for the Enga Regional Seat against Paul Torato.

“I will reverse the wind that is blowing up,” he had said during the campaign in a bold statement at Pindak village.
The largely illiterate population found this mind-boggling. They did not think a Highlander could hope to become Prime Minister.

Five years later, before the 1987 national elections, Balakau came to my office with a ready smile and said, “Kaimie, I am contesting the regional seat again. Please read this and convey the message to our people.”

He handed me a seven-page manuscript challenging the Enga elite to educate the masses to vote in good leaders. It read in part:

“It is discouraging for me to find that I am webbed in a world of base level politics. I cannot drill into the minds of voters a wide range of political issues affecting national politics. I find myself facing an uneducated voting majority who cannot understand and comprehend the issues affecting our province and nation.

“A post mortem of the 1982 elections reveal that I was prevented from victory because one smart Enga branded me an evil communist who would divide the wives, land, pigs and children amongst the poor and that I would ban the Seventh Day Adventist Church and introduce Sunday Law – an issue that is impossible for any politician to accomplish in a democracy like ours.

“A second factor was because a majority of people sold their votes for cash and material benefits. They exchanged their votes for vehicle rides, cash, cartons of lamb flaps and other favours. And in doing so they were selling their highest constitutional right to vote - the very votes that would decide the future advancement of this country.

“I tend to pause and ask myself whether, I, Malipu Balakau is unqualified to be a member of Parliament. At times I sit back and contemplate my school days and experiences in politics and ask myself: Is the sitting member of Enga more qualified than me?”

At the time, one of the most outspoken politicians to emerge from the Highlands region, Sir Iambaky Okuk, had succumbed to cancer. Balakau saw a vacuum to be filled.

“The sudden death of Sir Iambaky Okuk leaves a vacuum in Highlands politics. The region is without a voice, a leader who was willing to speak up and be a father of Highlands politics has died. It needs to be filled.

“What Engas fail to understand is that it takes no ordinary man to stand up and fight for others. Many times I have risked my neck to fight for the people with no reward. There are only a few who can commit themselves as a living sacrifice for the people.
“What Enga people lack is political education. They must be told to understand that their votes will determine the progress or regress of Enga. The province and the country are in the palm of their hands.”

Balakau had set his mind to lead the country. He saw the inequalities in job distribution and economic development in PNG and knew that the many illiterate Parliamentarians from the Highlands failed to see the big picture.

The people were convinced this time to elect Malipu Balakau as their regional member. And he soon became Minister for Communications. But, two years later, he was murdered by thugs before his full potential could be realised.

The first Highlands Prime Minister was Paias Wingti from the Western Highlands and now there’s a second one, Peter O’Neill from the Southern Highlands.

Enga has still to produce one.

Two hot contenders have been Grand Chief Sir Peter Ipatas, KBE, MP and Kandep member and Opposition Leader Don Polye, CMG, MP.

While Governor Ipatas’ People’s Party merged with Prime Minister Peter O’Neill’s People’s National Congress party, Poly’s THE Party collapsed and reduced in numbers due to resignations.
Don Polye and the K3 billion UBS Loan Controversy for Oil Search Shares

Many people from the remote frost prone district of Kandep wondered why their member, Don Polye had risked his high profile Treasury Ministry and Chairmanship of the Board of Governors of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 2014.

They were shocked when Prime Minister Peter O’Neill sacked him after the two men had together toppled the Somare - Abal government and together they had formed the current government in 2012 after the national elections.

Polye was dismissed outright for not signing prepared documents for the controversial K3 billion UBS loan to purchase 10.1% shares in Oil Search Ltd.

Polye explained why he was dismissed:

“I did not sign because the loan was unnecessary and would place a huge debt burden on the economy and would take generations to repay. Economic conditions will worsen and the people will become poor and forced to live below the poverty line.

“I felt the people would never benefit from our rich resources which God blessed all PNG citizens with. I expressed my views in our National Executive Council meeting of 6th March, 2014, but the Prime Minister did not respect my views as a senior state minister.

“Instead, he tried to entice me to sign it before he flew on the Kumul Falcon jet to Singapore. Before he left, he told me ‘there is something in it for us.’ When it dawned on me what he implied, it hit me like a ton of bricks. I was forced to choose between self-gain through a corrupt deal or protect the long-term welfare of PNG.
“Let me thank brave men and women who relentlessly fight all forms of deep-rooted corruption entrenched in all facets of life in PNG.

“I applaud lawyers, accountants, academics, doctors and other professionals who are against the UBS loan and tyrannical exploits of the current regime. They are the cream of PNG’s educated elites, the top brains the country has proudly produced but who else will our government and elected leaders receive advice and constructive criticism from?

“I do not claim to be a perfect individual but the way the constitution was trampled on to effect the UBS loan defies logic. Every elected member, whether they be in government, the opposition or in cabinet is duty bound to express his or her own views as we are mandated to do so by our people.

“But the Prime Minister accused me of causing instability in government and sacked me. I argued in the NEC meeting and in an official letter to the acting Secretary for the Department of Treasury that the loan did not promote prudent economic management policies instituted by the government. And the extra loan would increase the debt total to K6 billion this fiscal year (2014).

“The loan was not commercially viable and would create macro-economic instability which governs the exchange rate - the debt level must be low, there must be strong business confidence, inflation must not rise and the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) managed prudently to help the economic growth of this country.

“I even recommended that the loan be restructured based on the balance sheet of Petromin Holdings or any of the other state-owned entities and taken off the state’s balance sheet and this would have taken only a week to do. But the PM rushed to bulldoze the loan through.

“We had the NEC meeting on 6th March, I wrote the letter to acting Treasury Secretary on Sunday 9th, got sacked on Monday 10th and the loan was signed the very next day – Tuesday 11th.

“What are the future prospects of this country with this massive loan in place?

“I feel sorry for the cabinet ministers and the government because the UBS loan never went through the proper process. The cabinet meeting of 6th March was high-jacked by one man with the submission of the K3 billion UBS loan proposal and imposed on the
cabinet ministers around midday. He said the submission was to go to the Governor General before 6pm the same day for the loan approval.

“But we had no prior knowledge of the loan proposal until that day. It never went through proper procedures through Parliament, Treasury Department, National Petroleum Company and the Attorney General’s Office.

“Not many people know about it because of a lack of information and knowledge on the true nature of the loan. I went an extra mile to reveal how it was bulldozed through. I got sacked in the process.

“I took the matter to the courts for legal interpretation at my own expense in an attempt to prevent the growing culture of lies, deception and depletion of state funds by skilful manipulation of the system. This culture has to end.

“I value honesty, truthfulness, sincerity, generosity and genuine love for the people and not abuse their trust to become over-night millionaires and billionaires through corrupt deals.

“I ask my people of Kandep to bear with me during these trying times. One day you will understand why I was sacked. I will keep on fighting for our rights and the future of our children in this country.

“Only time will tell when it comes to reaping the fruit of the K3 billion UBS loan investment, Prime Minister Peter O’Neill has secured for us in Oil Search Ltd.”

With Don Polye’s sacking went the high profile treasury portfolio and the Chairmanship of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), a position he was about to assume early that year.

Polye’s Southern Region deputy leader of his THE Party and Minister for Labour and Industrial Relations, Mark Maipakai was also dealt the same blow by Prime Minister Peter O’Neill.

Then four of his THE Party members - three cabinet ministers including Grand Chief Sir Leo Dion, the Deputy Prime Minister and one former minister resigned from the party to join Peter O’Neill’s People’s National Congress party. They hoped to get more services to their electorate while sticking with the government.

Meanwhile, Polye’s Kambrip people of Gini village were involved in a year-long tribal war with the Akul tribesmen of his arch political rival – Alfred Manase. Over 100 people were killed in the fight and millions of kina worth property was destroyed.

Another devastating blow came when five of Polye’s relatives
plunged to their deaths in the middle of the night when the 10-seater they were travelling in crashed into a river in Jiwaka Province. They were returning home after attending a graduation ceremony at the University of Technology in Lae. Don Polye’s first son, Solo had just graduated with a degree in civil engineering - the same qualification, Polye himself had attained ten years previously.

“I take these as challenges in my life. I know life keeps on ticking, it doesn’t reverse. There are more horrific disasters but people overcome them,” Polye said. “Think of the Malaysian Airlines Boeing 767 which disappeared with all those people on board, the World Trade Centre bombing of 911 and many such disasters all over the world. I know, after the clouds have cleared, the sun always shines.”

Polye is a senior three-term Parliamentarian from Kandep. Despite the sackings and resignations his THE Party was for a while still a major coalition partner in the O’Neill - Dion government.

As party leader, Polye could easily have become the Deputy Prime Minister when he and Peter O’Neill formed government in Alotau immediately after the 2012 national elections.

But because he and Peter O’Neil are both from the populous Highlands region and because he had the conviction that power should be shared, he allowed his senior party member, Grand Chief Sir Leo Dion from the New Guinea Islands region to be given the Deputy Prime Minister position.

Polye has been a cabinet minister under three Prime Ministers to date, and was briefly deputy Prime Minister from July to December 2010. Earlier, he had held Foreign Affairs, Immigration, Transport, Civil Aviation, Finance and Treasury portfolios.

He was first elected in 2002 to the National Parliament as a member of the National Alliance Party. He was the Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation from July 2006 to August 2009. Grand Chief, Sir Michael Somare, the Prime Minister, appointed Polye to that position in July 2006 as part of a cabinet reshuffle.

As Minister for Civil Aviation he introduced an ‘open air’ policy ensuring that Air Niugini faced competition from other airlines starting from 2007. Polye was rushed from a political rally in his Kandep electorate in June 2007 after shots were fired from a helicopter. A rival candidate for his seat was later charged with attempted murder.

Polye was removed from his position as Member of Parliament on
14 August 2009 when the National Court determined that his victory in the 2007 general election was invalid. The judge's ruling included the observation that it was hard to believe that some polling stations had returned a 100% vote for Polye. The by-election for the seat took place on 9th November, 2009. He was successful in regaining his seat with an absolute majority yet again.

In July 2010, he replaced Puka Temu as deputy Prime Minister, when the latter tried unsuccessfully to unseat Prime Minister Somare through a Parliamentary motion of no confidence. Polye himself was removed as Deputy Prime Minister on 7 December 2010, in an impromptu reshuffle conducted under what Australia's ABC News called ‘unusual circumstances’.

However, he was appointed as Papua New Guinea's Foreign Minister later in December 2010, holding that position until another cabinet reshuffle in June 2011.

Member for Wabag, Sam Abal effected those changes when he was acting Prime Minister. Grand Chief, Sir Michael Somare was sick in a hospital in Singapore at the time. Consequently, Polye collaborated with the Opposition and wooed Peter O’Neill to be Prime Minister and brought down the government through a Parliamentary motion of no confidence in August 2011.

He was appointed Minister for Finance by new Prime Minister Peter O’Neill. In October, the National Alliance Party consequently sought to expel him from the party, but was prevented from doing so by a court order.

Later that month, it was reported simultaneously that Polye, along with many others, had been expelled from the party ‘for conduct prejudicial to the interest of the party’, and that he had been elected as party leader. In fact, the party split into factions, one of which was led by Polye.

In January 2012, he announced that he was de-registering the National Alliance Party, despite the existence of a rival faction claiming to be the legitimate party. Polye and his faction launched a new party, the Triumph Heritage Empowerment Rural Party (THE Party), ahead of the June 2012 general election.

On 27 February 2012, Prime Minister Peter O’Neill relieved him of the Finance portfolio, taking it on himself, citing ‘the continuing lack of ability by the department and ministry of finance to contain expenditure overruns outside of the budget appropriations’.
Polye retained the Treasury portfolio, and gained that of Border Development. Following the results of the 2012 general election Polye retained his position as Treasurer under a new cabinet announced by Peter O'Neill whose PNC Party and Polye’s THE Party had done very well and formed a coalition government in Alotau.

While holding the Treasury portfolio, he was appointed Chairman of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

“It was a shockingly pleasant news,” Polye said of his appointment. “It is a humbling experience, an honour for me personally. And a recognition of PNG as an active member of the international community able to contribute immensely to the global economy, a chance to showcase leadership in the region. I will not fail PNG.”

But Polye did not last to showcase his leadership. He was sacked by Peter O’Neill for not signing the UBS loan documents.

In the eyes of the law, Peter O’Neill may have erred to take out the $US 1.3 billion loan with the Australian branch of UBS bank to buy shares in Oil Search.

The move was controversial, with criticism over the approval and the level of debt incurred by the nation. The public prosecutor had asked the Chief Justice to set up a leadership tribunal to investigate his conduct in relation to the loan which Mr O’Neill welcomed.

"We welcome this decision because it gives us an opportunity to go before the independent tribunal and the courts to determine the outcomes of this decision based on real evidence," Mr O'Neill said.

A leadership tribunal is a quasi-legal forum that must be approved first by the Ombudsman, then the Public Prosecutor and finally the Chief Justice. At time of going to press, no such tribunal was established.

Polye’s parents were ordinary villagers from Gini village in Kandep District, Enga province. He was born sometime in the late 1960s. Nobody kept birth records in those days as people still lived very much like their ancestors did, passing on information from generation to generation by word of mouth.

Disaster struck in 1972 when the dreaded frost hit Kandep. Hunger was inevitable. The colonial administration effectively fed the people by supplying tons of rice and tinned food. Seeds and vines were also supplied.
But Don Polye’s father chose to flee the devastated district with his wife and the very young boy to the fertile Avi Blocks in Mt Hagen, Western Highlands province.

“I can vividly remember being picked up and thrown onto the back of a truck,” Polye recalled. “But I can’t remember much of the long journey.” The truck that transported the Polye family to Avi must have belonged to a Western Highlander which had been hired to transport rice to the devastated district.

Thus the boy grew up at Avi among Kuli youth, quickly learning the ‘Melpa’ language. But he was refused entry at Avi Community School because he was considered too young. “I cried when I was rejected and when they accepted Lyolem’s daughter to enrol. I was allowed to enrol later in 1974 to do preparatory class.”

In 1975, the year PNG gained independence, the young village boy did grade one. He went onto Mt Hagen High School from 1981 to 1984. He spent the next two years at Passam National High School. Then entered the University of Technology in Lae in 1987 to finally graduate with a Bachelor Degree in Civil Engineering in 1990.

While working with the Works Department he set his sights on national politics, having been influenced by it as a student leader at almost all the schools he had attended. He was the SRC president and president of the National Union of students at the University of Technology.

Don Polye unsuccessfully contested the Enga Regional Seat in 1992. He also lost in 1997 when he contested the Kandep Open seat held at the time by Jimson Sauk. The break came in 2002 when he finally won under a National Alliance ticket. Prime Minister Michael Somare appointed Polye as Minister for Transport and Civil Aviation.

From there he rose steadily up the political ranks facing a lot of obstacles which have no doubt shaped his political career, moulding him as a charismatic leader emerging from the Highlands region. He formed his own political party, which was a major coalition partner in the O’Neill led government.

Twice Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II bestowed on Polye the Imperial Honour - Champion of St Michael and Saint George, CMG for his services but he refused to accept it because he said he does not like titles and accolades heaped on a person. But when he was offered a third time, he accepted it reluctantly in 2013.

Added to his list of accomplishments is the attainment of a
Master’s Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from the Southern Cross University in Sydney, earned while still performing duties as a member of Parliament.

The pinnacle of his accomplishments so far was his short-lived appointment as Chairman of the Board of Governors of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

But he felt strongly that his life was not an experiment nor was it a biological mistake for him to have been born. He believes God formed him in his mother Akim’s womb for a divine purpose which he was seeking to fulfil.

Don Pomb Polye married Sharon, his childhood sweetheart in 1990 soon after graduating from university. They have six children - two girls and four boys. In 1980, he got baptized into one of the Christian denominations. But admitted he is not entirely perfect in God’s eyes.

During public rallies he always urged people to change their attitudes, go to church and live to enjoy life on this earth. Fluent in four languages including ‘Melpa’ the language he picked up growing up among the Kuli people, he draws crowds to him with magnetic flare.

“I am satisfied, I have achieved much. I must give credit to God who I believe wants me to be an agent of change among his people. I must promote gender equality, fight poverty, encourage peace and unity, promote economic development and encourage people to respect each other’s cultural identities,” he says. “I would like to remind children everywhere, especially those from Kandep, to embrace education tightly.

“Remember that some people mock us by referring to us as ‘Kandepeans’ but now I am changing that deceptive name tag to ‘Kandepions’ derived from the word ‘champion.’ Yes, become champions of education. It is through education that many people earn a living.

“If I, from an isolated backwater district has done it, you can too. Nothing will stop you from reaching your goals.”

But Don Polye was made to fall from grace when he was sacked as Treasury Minister and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Polye was a victim of politics, like another politician from Kandep - Danely Tindiwi who was jailed for seven years and his government
suspended twice for claims of maladministration.
The Fall of Danely Tindiwi & the Rise of Peter Ipatas

Bereft of power and friends Danely Tindiwi died alone in his daughter Jubilee’s house in Mt Hagen. For a long time he had battled the effects of a stroke - which paralysed him from the waist down - and deteriorating eyesight.

The man from Kandep who once wielded so much political clout spent most of his last years living a humble, reclusive life outside Wapenamanda among Yakuman tribesmen. Except for one loyal last wife, Tindiwi counted few friends.

Then, when his health deteriorated, he had gone to live in Jubilee’s house to have easy access to medical services at Mt Hagen General Hospital. Jubilee was a senior state lawyer with the Public Solicitor’s Office.

In early 2013, soon after her father’s death, Jubilee was appointed acting Solicitor-General by the government but was sacked a year later - like her late father, a victim of politics.

She had not opposed a warrant issued by the Port Moresby District Court in June 2014 for the arrest of Prime Minister Peter O’Neill in relation to his alleged involvement in millions of kina paid to Paul Paraka lawyers.

Jubilee had responded to her sacking with the statement: “I’m proud of upholding the rule of law in this country regardless of political intervention.”

In 1984, her father, Danely Tindiwi, had been jailed for seven years after a court found him guilty of official corruption regarding a K50,000 fund allocation for a road project.
Ten years later, after returning to office for only a year, Tindiwi made history when he became the first premier to be suspended a second time for the same allegations. It seemed as if Tindiwi was born to fight for political survival, until the stroke took him right out of the game.

Tindiwi never talked about his time in prison, nor did he explain publicly why he was suspended except to refer to ‘Enga politics’ which he said were the cause of his downfall.

“I was suspended purely for political reasons,” Tindiwi told me. “I didn’t go to jail because I did anything wrong. It was all politics. I can tell you the truth. Enga people must know why I went to jail.”

Tindiwi was a luckless man who felt jinxed by ‘Enga politics.’ But he had been suspended for a second time in 1993 following reports of gross mismanagement of public funds. It appeared he had learnt nothing from his first experience.

Then, in June 1994, then Provincial Affairs Minister John Nilkare reinstated Tindiwi’s government saying the anomalies which caused the suspension were rectified by departmental staff. But he never did explain what the anomalies were.

In August 1995, Enga MP Jeffery Balakau was sworn in as the first Governor of Enga under a reformed system. Tindiwi was relegated to serve as Balakau’s deputy.

The current Enga Governor, Sir Peter Ipatas, who at the time was president of Wabag Local Level Government, was sworn in as one of the assembly members.

During the swearing-in ceremony Tindiwi said: “Today we must leave behind our political interests and work hard to build Enga. Under this new system of government, we leaders must not divide ourselves into small groups. We must all join hands and develop Enga with a new vision.”

But Tindiwi’s call evaporated into thin air. A few months after the ceremony, the Enga Provincial Government was suspended a third time.

Allegations of misconduct in office were levelled against Governor Jeffery Balakau. He was subsequently found guilty by a Leadership Tribunal and dismissed from office in early 1996.

This paved the way for Daniel Tindiwi to once again assume the top political post in the province for the third time as acting Governor.
“In that capacity, I appointed Peter Ipatas as my deputy,” Tindiwi told me.

“But it was too late to realize my mistake. Ipatas challenged my position as acting Governor and wrested the seat away from me through the courts.”

The dreaded Engan politics had struck again and the rise of Peter Ipatas had begun.

However, soon after Ipatas assumed office as Governor, the PNG Cabinet suspended the Enga Provincial Government for a record fourth time.

But Ipatas fought vigorously and had his government reinstated, serving a full term until the 2002 national elections which he won easily. The people hailed him as a hero and gave him the nickname ‘Action Governor’ which has struck with him since.

But Governor Ipatas’ fight was far from over. In October 2004, he was referred to a Leadership Tribunal for alleged misconduct in office and found guilty.

Ipatas was fined a mere K1,000 on each of 16 counts, the tribunal finding that the greater fault lay with the Enga Provincial Administration and the Ombudsman Commission.

The fines were immediately taken care of by jubilant supporters who had packed the Waigani National Court in Port Moresby to hear the verdict.

When the 2007 elections came round, the people saw Ipatas as a visionary leader and returned him for a record third term.

By now Ipatas had matured into a savvy and wily politician who realised that he could not stand alone at national level politics, especially against the four Enga National Alliance (NA) members - Philip Kikala - Lagaip Porgera, Sam Abal - Wabag, Don Pomb Polye - Kandep and Mick Kaiok - Wapenamanda.

He joined Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare as a coalition partner and proved to be the antidote Somare needed to hold together his 27 members and neutralise an uprising from within the National Alliance.

It was caused by Kandep MP, Don Polye who was camping out in Goroka and privately holding talks with Sir Julius Chan and other opposition members camped at the Hideaway Hotel in Port Moresby.
Polye did not want Ipatas to be in camp but in so far as the Grand Chief was concerned he needed Ipatas at Kokopo and personally ensured that he was well looked after.

Ipatas and his party stuck with the government and maintained the status quo when former deputy Prime Minister and NA strongman, Sir Puka Temu broke away to the opposition in a failed attempt to change government in a vote of no confidence.

Once again Governor Peter Ipatas’ hand was felt when he nominated His Excellency, Sir Michael Ogio to contest for Governor General early in 2011.

He overlooked fellow Engan and former three term member for Wapenamanda, Sir Pato Kakaraya who had been contesting the mostly ceremonial post since 2002.

In mid-2011, when Sam Abal, in his capacity as acting Prime Minister went to Wabag to present a K16 million cheque to reseal the Wabag-Wapenamanda section of the Highlands Highway, Ipatas thanked him and reminded him of his support for the National Alliance-led government with something close to these words:

“I came to Kokopo to support your party to do something like this. I supported you to become acting Prime Minister to do this, to bring this much needed money to your province.

“We applaud you for doing this in a short time of being appointed acting Prime Minister and Minister for Works. Others who occupied the same portfolio allowed the roads in Enga to deteriorate,” Ipatas said.

He was of course referring to former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Works, Transport and Civil Aviation Don Polye who may have been too obsessed with becoming the next Prime Minister of PNG.

By showing incessant support for Sam Abal on numerous occasions, Ipatas was effectively driving a wedge between the two NA members from Enga province in Somare’s cabinet.

During a NEC meeting in Wabag before the Grand Chief was taken ill, Sir Michael and Lady Veronica did not spend the night in the official accommodation prepared for them but opted to stay at Pawas village with Sam Abal and his family in the humble house that late Sir Tei Abal had built to raise his family.
Sir Tei may have been his political rival in the House of Assembly but the Grand Chief certainly had respect for the man in whose son’s hands he entrusted the affairs of the nation.

First, Prime Minister Michael Somare appointed Abal as Foreign Affairs Minister then as his new Deputy Prime Minister in a cabinet reshuffle on 7 December 2010.

Somare removed his previous Deputy Prime Minister, Don Polye from the post in favor of Sam Abal.

A rift had formed between Somare and Polye stemming from an unsuccessful motion of no confidence against Somare in mid-2010, which was believed to be partially spearheaded by Polye.

Somare initiated the reshuffle in preparation for stepping down to face a leadership tribunal. It is alleged that Somare failed to submit financial statements between 1994 and 1997 and filed late statements between 1998 and 2004. Under Papua New Guinean law, the Prime Minister must leave office during the tribunal.

Somare stepped down as Prime Minister on 13 December 2010. In a prepared statement, Somare stated that he “will now voluntarily step aside and allow the deputy Prime Minister, Sam Abal, to assume full function and responsibility of the office of Prime Minister while he attends to clearing his name.”

Abal was sworn into office the same day and served as the acting Prime Minister during Somare’s tribunal and short suspension.

Sam Abal once again became acting Prime Minister in April 2011 when Prime Minister Somare flew to Singapore for heart surgery where he remained in hospital for nearly a year.

During Somare’s absence, Peter O’Neill served as Abal’s Works Minister. In August he joined with opposition MPs to topple Abal.

When O’Neill moved to take over government, Peter Ipatas moved with him to the opposition with his five People’s Party members to eventually merge with O’Neill’s People’s National Congress (PNC). When other members and parties also joined PNC, the ruling party strength surged to 57 – more than half the total members in Parliament.

Ipatas had dumped Sam Abal who had grown up with him at Pawas village in the late Sir Tei Abal’s house.

Peter O’Neill was elected as the acting Prime Minister in a Parliamentary vote on August 2nd, 2011 and was sworn in later in the day by the Governor-General
However, the appointment was brought into doubt, following disputes over whether Somare was validly dismissed from Parliament as a result of absences that occurred whilst he underwent medical treatment in Singapore. Somare’s supporters challenged his dismissal from Parliament in the country's Supreme Court, which ruled that his removal by the Parliament had been "unlawful."

Attempts by O'Neill to attend at the Governor-General's residence, for the purposes of having his role as the legitimate Prime Minister confirmed, were met with a block by armed police officers.

Parliamentary Speaker Jeffrey Nape is reported to have stated that Somare is an "ordinary person" and not a member of Parliament, a situation which would make O'Neill the legitimate Prime Minister.

In February 2012 just when the national elections was to take place in June, O'Neill dismissed coalition partner Don Polye as Finance Minister. This was a cruel blow to Polye who had teamed up with Peter O'Neill to dump the Somare-Abal government.

But politics in the land of the unexpected is unpredictable. Polye again joined forces with O'Neill to form the current government in Alotau immediately after the 2012 national elections were over.

Yet again Polye was dumped over the K3 billion UBS loan controversy forcing him to become the Opposition Leader.

Sam Abal lost to Robert Ganim who was endorsed by Peter Ipatas’ People’s Party. Ipatas himself easily won back the Governor’s seat for a record fourth term in office – making him the longest serving member of Parliament from the province.

But the ‘Action’ Governor fought some tough court battles along the way to remain in power. Unlike Tindiwi who was imprisoned and Jeffery Balakau who was dismissed, Ipatas had proved to be a hard man to put down.

The former ward councillor had made it to the top and stayed there for over two decades as Governor of Enga province, Grand Chief, Sir Peter Ipatas, KBE, GCL, MP.
PNG is Like Holding a Butterfly in Your Hands and Risk That it Will Fly Away

A much travelled Port Moresby resident wondered what strangers might think of Papua New Guinea when they read an article headlined PNG on the brink of anarchy in large red letters on a magazine’s front cover.

Immediately below the headline was a photograph of the so-called raskols of Port Moresby posing with threatening eyes and long-bladed knives. Men feared by residents who lived behind barbed wire as if in a maximum security prison.

The writer described a typical day in Port Moresby. “Business comes to a standstill at 6:30 pm. By 7:30 everyone is behind the barbed wire fences that surround their homes and the early hours of the night are left to the rascals who roam the streets.

“Dogs bark their warnings, and every shadow or silhouette brings fear. Thus life is lived in suspense. Yet deep within us is a strong yearning for peace. The break of dawn is a sight that brings relief from unease of the previous night. This is life in Port Moresby.”

Then the resident related how depressed he felt on a visit to Cairns which, unlike Port Moresby, was safe with shops open till 11pm and where people walked around freely.

“Why can’t PNG towns be like Cairns?” he asked. “Maybe because we have not really made the transition from primitive tribal communities to a sovereign nation state.”

Is this a common feeling among ordinary Papua New Guineans? Should leaders carry on as if nothing was wrong?
Leaders and people in positions of authority need to seriously reflect on PNG’s achievements and failures as an independent nation.

I have witnessed the cold-blooded murder of a village court magistrate, the fatal shooting of a senior police officer and serious injuries inflicted on other policemen in separate incidents in Enga Province.

“I am very disturbed at the attacks on my officers and I appeal to all leaders to help and apprehend the suspects,” then Regional Highlands Police Commander Bunu Katusele said. “I think leaders have to come out now and help the various law enforcement agencies to control law and order.”

A report by Dr Bill Wormsley and Michael Thoke in 1987 said people were becoming less and less clear on what was customary and what was modern. Young people were not learning the principles of customary law.

The academics recommended that the government address underlying social problems if it wanted the law and order situation to improve.

A former Enga police commander, Superintendent Mathew Minok, maintained that the solution lay with the word of God coupled with improved public relations and cooperation between police and the people.

Minok from the once rich fertile Tsak Valley of Enga had seen over 300 men killed in tribal fights in his valley. Much property was also destroyed.

Minok had even been chased into enemy territory by his own people when he tried to maintain a neutral role in the conflict between the Taskins and his own Yambaren tribe.

Another police officer, Inspector Peter Pyaso was gunned down supposedly by Lakain tribesmen in the remote Lapalama area of Enga when he went to stop a fight between the Lakain and Kakapandan tribesmen.

He had previously tried to persuade the government to legislate that tribes pay compensation for every police officer killed or injured when they tried to stop tribal fights.

“Most of the time, the lives of the policeman are in danger,” Pyaso wrote. “It’s about time the Police Department made some constructive decisions to boost our moral and make the risk worth taking in our fight against crime.”
What the reply was is unrecorded. But Inspector Peter Pyaso was killed and nobody was arrested. Nobody paid any compensation either.

Then the inevitable happened. The next time one of their members was injured, police took revenge.

A police reserve constable was injured by an arrow when he tried to stop a fight at Sirunki in Laiagam District. In retaliation, police shot dead four youths.

Police went on another revenge spree when Constable Andrew Rumbia was killed by an arrow near the mining township of Porgera. They shot a man dead, burnt stores and houses and slaughtered domestic animals.

If law enforcement officers were attacking the very people they were supposed to protect, there was something drastically wrong.

And the subsequent speeches by leaders were often inflammatory - leading to fully fledged tribal or regional confrontations ending in more deaths and destruction.

Deputy Chief Justice, the late Sir Mari Kapi, said: “Many leaders have got into conflict with the law, the respect for authority is at its lowest ebb. This is the age of what some people elsewhere have described as a golden age of greed, the philosophy of me, and age of individualism. I will get what I want regardless of what the law says.”

The onus was definitely on leaders to maintain stability and attain the political, social and economic prosperity of PNG.

It really does not matter who Papua New Guinea’s prime minister is or from which part of the country he or she may be from.

But the ideal leader is one who fights crime and corruption and ensures ordinary people enjoy life, economic prosperity and freedom.

People have high esteem for such leaders and hold their coffin high when they pass on. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare may have had his moments of weakness as prime minister but many people have high esteem for him as ‘the Father of the Nation’.

In 2015, the Grand Chief resigned from his party, the National Alliance, a major coalition partner in the O’Neill – Dion government.

Somare wanted to refer Peter O’Neill to the Ombudsman Commission under the Leadership Code on the grounds of illegally taking over the Somare-Abal government in 2011 when the Grand Chief was very ill in a Singapore hospital.

“Importantly, it is essential that my personal decision to make a
bold stand is remembered as a strategic move to preserve the public identity and internal integrity of our political party against the habitually illegal and negligent actions of Peter O’Neill,” Somare said.

O’Neill took the catch and said bluntly that the people of PNG need not worry about ‘Waigani politics’ because it has always been there but it will not provide the leadership that his government was providing.

“We know these people who play politics,” O’Neill said. “We know their history and background very well and what they are capable of doing.

“They are the same people who have been there to bring the country down. This won’t stop us from what we are doing. This government is focused to provide the leadership that this country needs.”

But while ‘Waigani politics’ plays out in the corridors of power the rest of the country is falling apart. After 40 years of nationhood, the gap between the haves and the have nots has got bigger.

It is a very dangerous trend to see the number of restless young men and women passing out of the education system every year. How many of the nearly 60,000 Grade 10 students who sat for their examinations in 2015 will win places at our tertiary institutions after they complete Grade 12 in 2017 - the national election year?

Leaders ought to be warned they are vulnerable to attacks from ordinary members of the public if politicians shout prosperity when there is no evidence of it in the rural areas of this resource rich country.

The kind of assassination that we have seen too many times in the United States is unlikely to happen in PNG because of the strong social bonds of regionalism, tribalism and wantokism.

But what happened to United States President William McKinley in 1901 in Buffalo, New York could also happen here. History could repeat itself in PNG.

Nonetheless, PNG politicians need to be warned that their actions can destabilise this multi-lingual and culturally diverse country - the worst thing that can happen to any country.

Our people are no longer living in the Stone Age. The colonial era is long gone. The people are learning enough to understand the work of government - how revenue is generated, how it is budgeted and where it goes.
Is it not right to assume that once people see millions of kina generated from their gold, copper, oil, silver, fish and logs and see no change in their own conditions - will they not rebel against a wasteful and corrupt government?

One of the founding fathers of PNG, President John Momis, has warned that there will be a revolution if leaders are not careful to distribute wealth equally and if they do not respect the laws of this country.

Leaders continue to be the key to a united PNG. Their very actions will determine PNG’s fate. The people will no longer enjoy peace and prosperity unless leaders change their attitudes and make honest decisions based on popular acceptance - Melanesian consensus must come into play at all levels of government.

Dr Momis said peace and the empowerment of the people are interlocked, for without involvement in the decision making process to regulate their own lives, people will never respect those decisions.

He is dead right. If people are not involved in decision making and equitable resource sharing, PNG will surely be headed on the path to total chaos - the beginning of anarchy.

The stability of PNG is what the poet said: “It is like holding a butterfly in your hand. You must keep your hand wide open and risk that it will not fly away. If you close your hand on it, you will crush it.”

And there are many enterprising people who love their country and are involved in worthwhile projects actively participating in PNG’s development.
From the German Doctor’s Idea, a Great Project is Born

“You have good mountains, beautiful scenery, good weather and many attractions which would pull people here but what you lack is a guesthouse.”


This conversation with his guest prompted Kome to start a guest house even though Sirunki was a ‘no-go zone’ at the time due to tribal warfare and constant armed hold-ups at Aipanda, on the border of Laiagam and Wabag.

Despite these problems, Kome converted his two-bedroom family home to a guest house. After developing it to a standard lodging facility, he named it Yaskom Resort Hotel.

The hotel is now a major tourist destination in the province and the venue for official receptions, seminars, workshops and social gatherings. Prime Minister Peter O’Neill prefers to stay there on official engagements in the province. And it’s where the PNG Rugby League board conducted its annual general meeting.

Australian High Commissioner Deborah Stokes launched the PNG Alumni Association there.

But for 10 years not a single tourist went to the hotel. Kome nearly gave up after developing the property, which had taken every last penny. I’ll let him take up the story:

“One day in 1990, a German tourist, a medical doctor, came to Sirunki unexpectedly. He took pictures of the lake and admired the
beautiful scenery and cool climate. In the afternoon he searched for a place to spend the night.

“But he was an expatriate and we had reservations about inviting him to sleep in our village style houses with pigs roaming around. You know, it was not conducive for him, one so used to modern comforts.

“I am a mechanic and I had a small two-bedroom permanent house. I offered him one of the rooms where he stayed for a whole week.

One morning he described the mountains, beautiful scenery, good weather and many attractions and suggested that it might attract visitors, especially if there was a guest house. “On my way here from Wabag, I saw no guest house along the way,” he said.

“I told him we don’t have a guest houses at Sirunki, Laiagam, Porgera, Kandep or anywhere else in these western parts because no tourist ever comes here. But to demonstrate what the people could offer, I asked people of Tukusanda village to stage a *singsing* especially for my German friend. He took many pictures and went back to Germany.

“The good doctor implanted a seed in my mind. So I renovated my two-bedroom family home as a guest house and developed it. I spent all my money hoping another visitor would come along. But none came for almost 10 years. I panicked and nearly gave up hope.”

But there was still hope for Yasowa Kome. Governor Peter Ipatas won the 1997 national elections and immediately formulated a policy to promote tourism and economic activity in the province. People were encouraged to establish guest houses.

Kome felt reluctant to approach the governor because he had not supported him during the elections. But he was desperate to get a licence so he wrote a letter. Ipatas didn’t respond. Three years later, after a third attempt, Ipatas asked him to see him at Irelya village.

After some scolding, Ipatas granted the coveted licence. This was followed by a grant of K100,000 from the provincial government. Kome accepted the gesture as a blessing and continued to improve his property.

“I saw the governor in March 2000, and up till now the evidence of the blessing he bestowed on me is what you can see today - this hotel is a result of Ipatas’s vision to see more tourists come to this province,” Kome said.
The hotel was officially opened by Moses Maladina, then Minister for Rural Development and Implementation, on 12 August 2011.

Kome was left speechless when Maladina presented him with a surprise gift of K200,000. At last his perseverance to change the perception of a forlorn area torn apart by tribal warfare and transform it to a safe destination for visitors had been recognised by the national government.

The Minister also presented K200,000 to the Enga Tradition and Transition Centre and K50,000 to the annual Enga Cultural Show staged that same weekend in Wabag town.

The following year, the then member of parliament Philip Kikala launched the Lagaip-Porgera five year district development plan. One of its aims was to boost tourism activity in his district and stage the first ever West Enga Cultural Show in Laiagam, a 10-15 minute drive from the new hotel.

Canadian Rev Herb Sachn, a former missionary, was the first visitor after the hotel was officially opened and he was soon followed by eight American tourists. Then the floodgates opened to an influx of visitors.

Every year during Australian rugby league State of Origin matches, footie-mad folks flock to Yaskom Resort Hotel to watch their favourite game on the big screen in the public forum area or book into one of the cosy rooms to enjoy the game in privacy.

These days the hotel features 26 self-contained rooms with electric heaters and hot water, two car parks, five standard rooms, a public bar, a spacious and fully kitted dining room, conference facilities that can accommodate 100 people and TV sets in all self-contained rooms.

There are plans to improve and expand operations including fifteen additional self-contained units with nine of the rooms facing the picturesque Lake Ivae glistening down in the valley.

It is a shining example of how one man can transform a forlorn area torn apart by tribal war into something that not only brings in a regular income but peace and harmony among his people.

It is where total strangers can enjoy the natural beauty and culture of the people like the German doctor did all those years ago.

His father being a former Gutnius Lutheran Church pastor and himself a committed christen, Yasowa Kome saw God’s blessing in abundance when he saw the success of his hotel operation and how
the community had settled down in total peace for many years – in an area that had seen continuous tribal fighting.

Kome decided he should give something back to God and the people – something that would glorify God’s name and impact the whole community.

In 2014 he told the Gutnius Lutheran Church congregation at Sirunki that he would build a new office to replace the old one built by American missionaries. It was to be used by all the Bishops of Region Three and Four. And so in late, 2015 he contracted a local company to build it at a cost of nearly K500,000.

Kome dedicated the new office complex to his late father – and named it ‘Nicodemus Centre’.

It was officially opened on 3rd January, 2016 by Acting Governor General and Chief Justice of PNG, Sir Salamo Injia who himself is the son of a Lutheran Church pastor in the Tsak Valley of Wapenamanda.

And like Yasowa Kome, there are many enterprising people spread right across the country humbly involved in charity organisations and village-based ventures - activities that which binds a man to his inheritance, the land that he loves dearly.

Land which elders said is the breast from which a man gets his nourishment from. Land is a living soul, the lifeblood of an individual, which must never be taken away from him or traded even for a billion bucks.

Cr Yasowa Kome built the office complex and gave it to the church using proceeds from his hotel he built on his own land which has been in his family line for as long as his Kunalun ancestors settled on the Sirunki Platau thousands of years ago.
Mountain Home
By Luke Puye

I have a home
Where grass grows green
Where streams flow free
There birds fly low
Where dreams grow wild

Up in the rugged highlands
Higher still
On mysterious cloud covered mountains
Where giant oak trees there do sway
Where cool breezes there do sigh
There does my heart’s desire

Towns or cities I’ve been there
Tens of places I’ve flown or sailed
Places over hills and valleys
Places over the seas and oceans
But nowhere have I been
Is like my mountain home

You might think it so rugged
So cold or so remote
Better places on your mind be
But to me
My mountain home is the best
To me it’s not far from paradise

Note: This poem was published in the University of Papua New Guinea Enga Student’s Association Yearbook in 1986.
Glossary

Barasapen nuu - knapsack
Bilum – String bag
Blackman – people of dark skin. People of African decent
Buai or betelnut - a small round nut chewed with lime and mustard
Dinau – credit
Dokta boi – Aid-post Orderly
Haus kalabus – jail, prison
Hauskrai – funeral home
Hausman – house exclusively for men
Kaikai – food
Kama – village ceremonial ground
Kapaon yoko – the leaves of a local tree
Kaukau – sweet potatoes
Keoakali Takaupin – a cruel one-eyed giant, who inflicted harm on people
Kiap – Colonial Administration Patrol Officer
Koma – sponge-like plant used by women during their periods or during child birth
Koneakali – European
Kumu – greens, vegetables
Lalyakali Kimala – A handsome and kind superhuman being
Laplap – piece of cloth used as clothing
Lip ti – tea
Luluai – village headman appointed by kiaps
Masalais – bad spirits of the forest
Masta – European, boss
Matmat – grave
Meri – woman, women
Misis – European lady. Wife
Moka – Hagen trade name for exchange of wealth
Motu – The third national language of PNG
Muruk – Cassowary a flightless bird found in PNG. Brand name of processed tobacco stick
Pinis taim – end of contract
Polis boi – policeman
Pulim Anda – A small hut for women to use during their monthly periods or during child birth
Sambai kendole – dry pitpit used as torches in the night
Singsing – dance festival
Solwara – sea, ocean
Suka – sugar, sugarcane
Tambu – an edible fern leaf.
Tambu - brother-in-law or sister-in-law
Tanim tok – interpreter
Tee – Enga trade name for exchange of wealth
Tok pidgin – Pidgin language
Toksave – message, notice, announcement
Wanbel – agree, acceptance
Wantok – person who speaks same language, relative or friend
Warapae – the pigs killed in a feast to seal marriage
Whiteman- man of European decent
Yupuni – hand woven figure worshipped by the Enga
Yuu Koeleam aoo – The earth is ending farewell
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel Kumbon studied Journalism and Media Studies at UPNG. In 1983, he helped to establish *Enga Nius* under the Communication Development Component of the over-all Provincial Development Program called ‘Enga Yakaa Laseamanda or EYL for short. The five year project was a national government initiative facilitated by a K8 million loan from the World Bank.

Daniel started his career in the media industry with the National Broadcasting Commission in 1977. He worked as Director Media and Information Technology until 2008 in the Department of Enga Administration. He has won international scholarships to the United Kingdom, 1989, United States of America, 1991 and Mexico City, 2008. He has also travelled extensively. He published his short story ‘Climbing Mountains’ with Oxford University Press. It is distributed as a supplementary reader for Grade 6 – 8 students. He also published some poetry with UPNG’s Ondobondo Literary Magazine and Manoa published by the University of Hawaii.

He compiled *Remember Me and other short stories from Enga Province* which was published by Pukpuk Publications in 2015.

*I Can See My Country Clearly Now* is his first full length book.

Daniel is married with eleven children and seven grandchildren.
1. British High Commissioner, His Excellency Michael Howell (centre) at Anditale High School
2. Me with Val Williams and Patsy Robertson after giving them Highlands Caps at Cardiff Castle
3. Lt Barney Nelson with Highlands cap I’d given him as a parting gift, 1991
4. Me with a new found friend in Mexico City, 2008
5. Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare and High Commissioner Renagi Renagi Lohia in New York greeting foreign dignitaries at a reception on the night before the vote for UN President was taken, 1991
6. Fr. Jerry G Theis SVD, late Fayre and Jim Fenton in Kandep in the 60s
7 Jim Fenton (centre) after receiving his Police Overseas Service Medal in 2014
8 Fose Kake and Dr Samson Amean
9 Alois Hemetsberger and his Engan wife
10 Lloyd Warr with his dog and policemen at a singsing in Kandep, 1960s
11 SDA Pastors at Rakamanda Jubilee celebrations, 1994
12 Bishop Rt Rev. David Piso and former head Bishop of Gutnius Lutheran Church PNG the late Rev. Dr Waim Waisa
13 Bishop Nick Aiyane (centre) being sworn-in as head bishop of GLC - PNG at Birip
14 Fr. Jerry Gerald Theis SVD
15 Donna, David Minich and two of their sons in Cleveland, 1991
16 The late Sir Tei Abal being laid to rest at Keas village. Governor General, Sir Wiwa Korowi was in attendance as well as Wabag MP, the late Sir Tei Albert Kipalan and other dignitaries
17 The late Sir Albert Kipalan at the time he was member for Wabag in the House of Assembly
18 Father of the Nation, Grand Chief Sir Michael Somare
19 Former Wabag MP and one time acting Prime Minister, Sam Abal
20 Prime Minister Sir Rabbie Namaliu with Danely Tindiwi, Lagaip/Porgera MP, Tenta Lau and PJV’s Doug Fraser during the official opening of the Porgera Gold Mine, 20 October, 1990
21 First Premier of Enga Province, Danely Tindiwi
22 Enga Resident National Court Judge, the late Moses Jalina warned people not to be complacent
23 Grand Chief Governor Peter Ipatas, KBE, MP taking oath of office as a Provincial Assembly member in August, 1995. He has remained there since
24 Opposition Leader, Don Pomb Polye, CMG, MP, 2014
25 Former National Communications Minister, the late Malipu Balakau a couple of months before his murder
26 Yaskom Resort Hotel owner Yasowa Kome, 2015