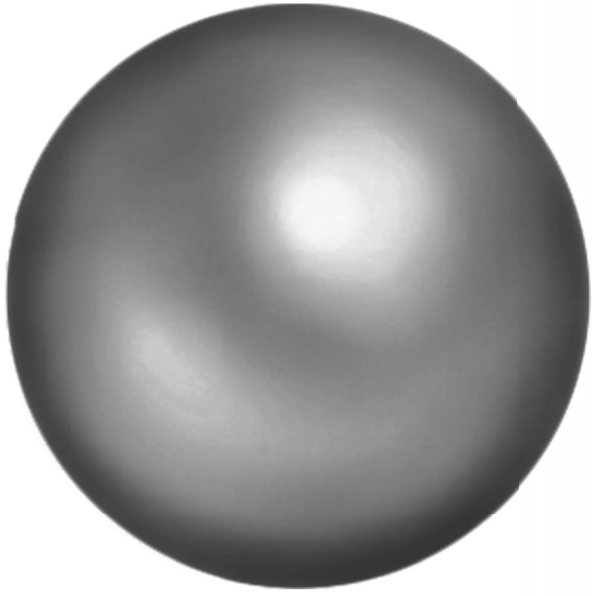
# THE WORLD IS YOUR PEARL

## My Adventures from Bougainville to Ladakh and Everywhere in Between



GLENDA WISE

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# ~ *Testimonials* ~

Glenda Wise is a real force of nature. A highly creative and skilful artist, she approaches everything she does with enthusiasm, humour and passion. Over the past fourteen years I have had the privilege of sharing cycling and trekking adventures with her, all over our wonderful planet. These have taken us to some of the most magnificent locations on earth.

Glenda is a perfect example of why life was meant to be exciting and fun. She never shies away from a challenge, even when it takes her well out of her comfort zone. Whether it's walking along a narrow snow ledge in Nepal, watching the hippos on the Okavango River, cycling across Europe or hot air ballooning over Cappadocia, Glenda has done it all and always keeps coming back for more.

In so many ways she truly epitomises the motto of 'carpe diem'.

**~ Dennis Dawson ~**

Through her natural turn of phrase and easy-flowing text, I was drawn into Glenda's exciting world of adventure travel. Immersing in her unique experiences, taking in the breathtaking sights, meeting those who shared her journeys, admiring her inner strength, as fears were challenged and uncertainties put aside. Glenda's book is an inspirational read for those of us with an adventurous spirit, who desire to be challenged, and who yearn to leap out of our comfort zones.

*The World Is Your Pearl* is sheer enticement to take your travel experiences to the next level.

**~ Allison Perry ~**

Glenda Pearl Wise is one of the most determined, adventurous and fun-loving people I have ever met. I have looked forward with great anticipation to this book.

**~ Peter Warren ~**

From rocketing down a cobblestone mountain on a bicycle screaming "I don't know how to get off" to joyfully shrieking on a bouncing suspension bridge in the Himalayas, or traversing a narrow snow-filled ledge with a sheer drop below, Glenda takes to adventure the same way she does to life, with a dazzling smile, and without fail, a fresh coat of 'lippy'. Enjoy the fabulous journey.

**~ Mike Litchfield ~**

What a treat it has been to travel with Glenda on some fabulous trips! We have wonderful memories of her beautiful smile, infectious laughter and many meaningful conversations. We've ridden with her from the time she

needed assistance to get the pedals rolling—literally!—to the time we travelled over endless mountains and villages throughout rural China. We've hiked across the Nepalese mountain peaks through blizzards, lightning strikes and the magnificent rhododendron forests. We've done yoga stretches together in the queue waiting for a squat toilet, puffed our way through the icy darkness to see a stunning sunrise, then danced and sang our way back down. We've cried over deleted photos, laughed while playing Yahtzee and Uno, and we've shopped 'til we dropped whenever we could! We would do it all again in a flash. A journey through Glenda's adventures is an inspirational story of the importance of friendship, a sense of humour and pushing the boundaries.

**~ Viv and Linton ~**

There are folk who look at something and say, "I couldn't do that" or "I wish I could do that but I know I'd fail".

And they'd end their days wishing they'd had the courage to give it a go too late! And then there is Glenda.

No doubt the first two sentiments crossed her mind, and all that resulted was a driving motivation to get out there and try. And try she did. And succeed she did. And I don't know how she survived much of it. Mountain passes in outback China, riding across 3000 kilometre deserts in Oz and the rain of Finland on a pushbike. But there she is. A living testimony to a gutsy lady who refuses to let any barrier get in her way of ensuring life is jam-packed with adventure.

Hats off to you, Glenda.

**~ Jon Bate ~**

# THE WORLD IS YOUR PEARL

## A Memoir of Adventure Travel

This book is dedicated to
The women of my family over the past hundred years
THE PEARL GIRLS

.

My Grandmother
Pearl Adelaide

.

My Mother
Pearl Gwendolyn

.

(I came next)
Glenda Pearl

.

My Daughter
Emma Pearl

.

My Granddaughters
Abigail Pearl
and her sister
Willow

# ~ Contents ~

# Foreword

**~ Mary Moody ~**

One hot spring evening in New Delhi I met Glenda Wise for the first time standing at the reception desk of the swish hotel where we would spend just one night before heading off before dawn on a flight to Ladakh, high in the Indian Himalayas.

I'm not one to judge by first impressions, but I was immediately struck by this colourful, elegant woman with a wide smile and outrageously flamboyant glasses. We were embarking on a yoga trek and most of the group knew each other as members of a yoga class in rural NSW. Glenda had travelled from Melbourne and over dinner that night, she quickly integrated into the group, her laughter and funny travel anecdotes keeping us amused for hours.

As a tour guide my job has many facets including keeping the group together and happy while negotiating with the local guides and support team. My aim is always to ensure that each person has a safe and memorable experience, and I also hope that our journeys will be life changing. Profound.

I quickly realised that Glenda was determined to enrich her experience by capturing every moment with her trusted camera. Wherever we went—into monasteries, to cultural festivals or up winding paths at high altitude—Glenda was always 'off track',

**Outside Mary's house in France**

seizing the moment. I found it difficult to keep up with her. Indeed, once she caused me heart failure by wandering cheerfully amongst a herd of wild yaks, snapping away and seemingly oblivious to the dangers surrounding her. We had words.

In a sense, Glenda goes out into the world well prepared in many ways yet with an open heart and mind. There is a certain naivety in the way she embraces the world that is both refreshing and addictive.

Glenda has written about her many and various adventures during the worst of times—the COVID pandemic which has stopped all international tourist travelling and will forever change the way we, as travellers, negotiate the world. Now is a time when we need to rethink every aspect of global tourism. My personal philosophy has always been that the only way to REALLY see the world is on foot,

slowly, gently, step by step. Small groups offer huge experiences and hopefully a low environmental impact.

Glenda has shared but a fraction of her traveller's tales. None of us knows what the future holds but I am quite certain that when the world opens up again she'll be out there in the thick of it. She's a brave and resilient woman.

Mary Moody August 2020.

# ~ Introduction ~

***I stand up, and although the guide I choose***
***may be no more than a wandering cloud,***
***I cannot miss my way—William Wordsworth.***

I was born with a wanderlust, and have visited more than 40 countries, twenty of which were concentrated into the latter part of my life in the form of adventure travel. It was not until 2006 at the age of 53, when I joined the Warby Ghostriders group of cyclists, that I discovered the thrill of a more extreme form of seeing the world by cycling and trekking through some of the most remote regions on earth.

My adventure travels became not simply tourism or sightseeing, but a collection of unparalleled experiences. For me it became everything from the sensory discovery of breathtaking natural wonders, to cultural exploration and amazing encounters with incredible people. It not only challenged me, but connected me to people from all corners of the globe.

As a child, aged three, it all began with Walt Disney. He was the catalyst for the direction of my life in two ways, through art and travel.

My father won the first black-and-white television to arrive in Australia in 1956. He entered a competition run by the Bryant & May Matchstick Company with a challenge to build the best model made entirely of matchsticks. Dad's model won. It was a log cabin with a lady and a man out the front. At the flick of a switch, a light came on inside, music started to play, and the figures began to dance with arms and legs moving as they jiggled up and down on little posts.

When the new TV arrived, there was great excitement up and down Darling Avenue in Upwey, where we lived in the Dandenong Ranges. The first thing to come onto the screen was *Disneyland*. Walt Disney hosted his TV show each week and became my hero. He sparked a wonder of far-off places, as he took us to somewhere new every time. Various films were created around different Disney 'lands'. Adventureland showed *'the wonder-world of nature's own realm'* immersing viewers into places like the remote jungles of Africa, Asia, South America and the South Pacific. Frontierland presented *'tall tales and true from the legendary past'* and took us into the American old west, of pioneers, cowboys, gold rushes and saloons. Another was Tomorrowland, which described *'the promise of things to come'* and depicted themes of the future.

As a small child, I was enraptured in all these 'lands', and one of my huge favourites was the magical kingdom of animation through Fantasyland, *'the happiest kingdom of them all'*. Walt Disney took the viewer into the animators' studios to see the artists at work. The inspiration behind Disney's animated cartoons also had a lifetime impact on me. Hundreds of cartoons were created through thousands of drawings. The first one I saw was the story of *Bambi*, a young fawn. I couldn't believe seeing a drawing move when a droplet of water fell off a leaf onto Bambi's nose. Once again, Disney shot me like an arrow, this time into the world of art, and was the reason I became an artist. His influence went far and wide.

When I was six, two documentaries were shown at our school. A film projector was set up behind rows of wooden pews in the foyer outside our headmaster's office. The first film projected onto the wall was about a tribe of Pygmies living deep inside the jungles of Africa. The second was of an arctic explorer, Harold Thornton, the father of Anne, one of the children in my class.

I was dazzled by visions of jungles with tropical vegetation and the lives of a race of tiny people living and surviving on their own with no shops to buy their food. Never having seen snow or ice before, I was also in awe of Mr Thornton and his friends picking their way through it. Getting a glimpse of both these far-off places was utterly amazing to me. I think this must have been the first spark of a desire to explore. I longed to experience the world and its wonders.

Fascinated by the ways of life of so many cultures, I continued to research books, such as our neighbour's encyclopedia, and to watch any film about the outside world.

I grew up in a very controlled household, and had neither the freedom nor the means to think of travel. There was no question of going off to experience life for myself. Apart from family caravanning holidays, travel for me was non-existent until my mid-twenties. I started to pore over travel brochures after I met my future husband, Peter.

A long time before we were married, we took a short tour of Malaysia in 1972, then saved up to travel again, this time on an organised bus tour to see the tourist attractions throughout the main countries of Europe in 1976. Over a period of six weeks, we saw all the major highlights, visiting opulent palaces, cathedrals and castles, and colourful festivals, fairs and marketplaces. It was remarkable to me that, for such a relatively small continent, the concentration of religious and wartime history, and variations of ancient architectures were so vast.

In Holland, I loved the windmills, tulip farms and canals. Along the Rhine Valley, we ate and drank in beer halls in small German villages. Travelling up into the Alps of Austria and Switzerland, we were dazzled by a wonderland of snow-capped alpine peaks, contrasted with lush green pastures. We ate pasta and drank red wine overlooking the azure sea of the Mediterranean coast. We visited Italy, with its rich cities of Rome, Florence and Venice; Paris, with its glorious palaces and cathedrals; French chateaux throughout the Bordeaux region; and the flamenco dancers and fishing villages in Spain. Each country had its own flavour and extreme beauty.

We travelled back to London from Paris on a ferry, and hired a car to explore England, Scotland and Wales. Staying in farmhouses and manor houses, we lived with the local people for a further three weeks.

Our epic holiday finished with a stay in Greece and a five-day cruise of the Mediterranean islands of Mykonos, Rhodes, Crete, Piraeus and Santorini.

This was a huge whirlwind trip and a convenient way to see the essence of a lot of places in a short time. The only pitfall was that the group dynamics of the large busload of elderly tourists we travelled with throughout Europe were of the retired set, and it was a long time for us to be stuck together.

Peter and I were married two years later in 1978 and knuckled down to buy a house, with no further thought of any spending on travel.

Five years later, my first taste of adventure was provided by my brother, who lived and worked in Bougainville. He knew I'd love the jungles and the lifestyles of its people and invited me over, paying my airfares, to experience the wild and remote places of Papua New Guinea, which was, and still remains, one of the best times of my life.

Our children came along in 1984 and 1985. The joy of motherhood exceeded my wildest dreams, and the next nineteen years were devoted to my son, Cameron, and daughter, Emma.

In 2000, Peter and I parted company while still remaining friends. He moved out and ensured I wasn't left with the burden of a mortgage. Cameron worked for a construction company and also moved out some months later.

I was teaching art, and Emma had a part-time job in a bakery. We were both able to save some money. In 2002, we purchased large backpacks and travelled through Italy for a month, staying in YMCA and backpacker accommodations. Emma was seventeen. This was a unique experience for both of us as we gypsied all over Italy by means of public transport, though we did it hard. Travelling without an itinerary or the help of Google meant that we made a few mistakes along the way and spent a lot of time waiting for buses and trains.

Because we'd done the trip on such a shoestring, we came home with enough money to go to Bali the same year.

Our backpacks were hauled out again four years later in 2006 to trek the Overland Track in Tasmania from Cradle Mountain to Lake St Clair. This was a spectacular undertaking for both of us, and a feat of endurance for me to carry 20 kilograms for 100 kilometres. Emma was fit and young and able-bodied.

It was in this year that my long-awaited yen for world adventure unexpectedly fell into place with the plan of a cycling trip to China in 2007. This was immediately followed by a further cycling trip to another region of China in 2008, and a trek through Nepal in 2009. I became hooked. I could not stop, as the adventures continued to the present day. The trick was to book each trip a year ahead, pay the deposit, then pay it off ahead of time.

In 2012, Cameron, Emma and I attended respective two-day dive courses and attained our PADI, Level 2 International Scuba Diving licences. These came in useful on our trip the following year to Hawaii where we went reef and wreck diving off the coast of Oahu, and on a night dive with the manta rays off the big island of Hawaii (although this *dive* for me is described differently within these pages).

Anyone with a medium level of fitness can experience adventure. All it takes is a desire to go for it, to choose where to go, some sensible preparation and, for a reasonable amount of money; the World Expeditions experts do the rest with teams of hundreds of support people behind the scenes worldwide. Their experts research the areas, terrain, conditions and accommodations (many times in the homes of the tribes or cultures to be visited). They book the flights and transfers, and provide quality bikes and camping equipment, energy-sustaining food and clean drinking water. Also employed are the cooks, guides, Sherpas, porters, mules, yaks and pack horses. To do this alone would cost a fortune, and wouldn't be half the fun as travelling with like-minded people.

For me to leave home and be immersed into another culture can have a varying effect from total relaxation to pure adrenaline. The small groups I travel with are brought together with lifelong memories and the most amazing stories to tell, as we visit areas off the beaten track. It is both exciting and exhilarating. Being able to experience the ancient customs and lifestyles of many cultures, I have learned about their traditional lives at a deep level in a sustainable way. It is a huge privilege to witness these ways of life before progress changes them forever.

Apart from actually getting there, this mindful way of exploring by human power on foot or by bicycle is gentle on the earth, and with experienced guidance, all the worry is taken out of it. These

encounters have become some of the greatest highlights of my existence. The small groups of people who join these World Expeditions are from all walks of life, and we become bonded forever through our experiences. *The World Is Your Pearl* is only a snippet from the many travel journals I've kept.

I have listed many of my trips below, though this story describes just a few of the *experiences* which I discovered can only be had through a different form of travel, and for me, is the only way to go.

My *adventure* travels are shown in bold, and those conducted by World Expeditions are tagged with an asterisk.

1972: Malaysia, Singapore, Malacca, Kuala Lumpur, Penang
1976: England, Scotland, Wales, Holland, France, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Greece, Mediterranean Islands, Crete, Mykonos, Rhodes, Santorini, Piraeus
**1983: Bougainville, Papua New Guinea**
**2002: Italy** (Backpacking)
2002: Bali
2003: Bali
2004: Bali
**2005: Perisher** (skiing)
2006: Adelaide
**2006: Tasmanian Overland Track** (Backpacking/Trekking)
2006: Karratha
**2007: China, Tiger Leaping Gorge** (Ghostriders—Cycling)
**2008: China,** Karst Mountains, Guiyang to Yangshuo (Ghostriders—Cycling)
**2009: *Nepal, Kathmandu, Annapurna, Pokerah** (Ghostriders—Trekking)
2009: Thailand
**2010: Nullarbor** (Cycling)
2011: Italy, Rome, Bologna, France, Ukraine

**2011:** **Vietnam,** Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh (Cycling)
**2012:** ***Africa,** Botswana, Zimbabwe, Kalahari Desert, Namibia (Ghostriders)
**2012:** ***Turkey, *Greece,** Santorini (Ghostriders—Cycling/Trekking)
2013: Tasmania
**2013:** **Hawaii** (Scuba Diving)
**2013:** ***France,** Paris to Le Croisic—West Atlantic Coast (Ghostriders)
2013: Los Angeles, Disneyland, New York
2014: Singapore
2014: Vietnam
**2014:** ***Finland, *Sweden, *Russia, *Latvia, *Estonia** (Ghostriders)
**2015:** **South Pacific,** Noumea, New Caledonia, Vila Vanuatu (Scuba Diving)
**2015:** ***India, Delhi,** *Kashmir (Mary Moody)
**2015:** ***Leh, Ladakh** (Mary Moody: Yoga—Trekking)
2015: *Srinagar, Agra, Rajasthan
2016: Broome, Darwin
**2017:** ***Morocco,** Marrakesh, High Atlas Mountains (Mary Moody Trekking)
2017: *France (Mary Moody)
2017: *Dubai
2017: Cairns
**2018:** ***South America, *Peru, *Argentina, *Brazil** (Ghostriders)
**2019:** ***Mongolia** (Mary Moody—Trekking)
2019: *Japan
2019: Tasmania
2020: Bali
2010: Mexico, ***Cuba** (Ghostriders—Cycling)

There are many places I'd still love to see: Bhutan; the Amazon Jungle; an island hop through the Mediterranean Sea on a yacht; exploring Iceland; remote forests of Japan; Portugal; Pakistan; Ireland; Poland; coastal islands off Croatia; Slovenia; Serbia; Albania; Sarajevo; Armenia; scuba diving through the Caribbean and other pristine waters around the world.

My greatest love is of tropical islands, and I would love to find a coral reef with the colour and sea life I had once seen off Sohano Island in the Buka passage in Bougainville.

Meanwhile, join me on a handful of my adventures.

CHAPTER 1

# *The Jungles of Bougainville ~ 1983 ~*

***Once the travel bug bites there is no known antidote, and I know that I shall be happily infected until the end of my days—Michael Palin.***

y yen for adventure began with my brother Steve. When he was 18 and I was 21, the family moved to the Isle of Sorrento on Queensland's Gold Coast where Dad built a beautiful home on a canal. Steve and I worked for the mining company, Mineral Deposits Limited. I was in administration, and Steve was apprenticed as a welder and attained specialised welding certificates.

Some years later, when I was living in Melbourne with Peter, a former colleague came in and told Steve he was working in gold and copper mines in Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, and making a fortune. Steve gave his notice and enlisted for work in Bougainville too. He was 24 years old.

Steve and I were close. He wrote me a letter describing the tropical paradise where he lived and worked, saying, “You’ve gotta get over here” and enclosed a flight ticket.

At that time, if a woman wished to travel overseas, she was required to have written permission from her husband and her employer. I had worked for nine years as secretary to Mike Buxton, Director of Myer Stores, Australia. Both he and Peter had a bit of fun playing cat and mouse as they respectively made me squirm, suggesting it wouldn’t be pertinent to allow me permission, as a woman such as myself could well find herself in a ‘sticky situation’ in the wilds of Papua New Guinea.

However, after a lot of banter and with their blessings, on Saturday, January 8, 1983, I left for Port Moresby. On the flight I met a man called George with a dear little Papuan child called Diane, beaming with her baby-tooth smile and fuzzy hair in a topknot, all dressed in lemon. I was not sure of their connection; however, George was very helpful. His destination was Port Moresby, but when we landed, he went out of his way to see me safely onto the plane to Kieta, Bougainville. If he hadn’t been there I would surely have missed the flight. I had no idea about procedures and I was told the PNG nationals were often not very helpful. The Port Moresby Airport was pretty overwhelming compared to the few airports I’d seen. It was just a large shed with a concrete floor, and not much to it. I felt very conspicuous as though being watched by a thousand eyes. There was a very strong smell of ammonia, and what appeared to be splotches of blood everywhere all over the floor.

This, I discovered, was betel-nut spittle. The seed of the fruit of the Areca palm was chewed by various cultural groups and individuals, and used as a stimulant drug, which was unfortunately carcinogenic. It gave a sense of euphoria and well-being. The user’s mouth, teeth and gums were discoloured a dark red-brown colour, and stimulated the flow of saliva, causing the chewer to spit.

It was hot and steamy. Indigenous men, women and children were lying around everywhere on the airport floor, chewing their betel-nuts and staring. I suppose I did stand out as a 29-year-old Aussie woman with blonde hair and lipstick.

There was not much assistance to be found, as there were no flight desks as I knew them. Fortunately George made all the arrangements for me, running all over the airport, as things had altered since he'd been there a month prior. I waited by his trolley of luggage with little Diane sitting on the cases. I was very glad of George's help, and eventually walked through the gates and hopped on the 'Betel-nut Express'.

Bougainville is an island of Papua New Guinea. It is located in the northern Solomon Islands archipelago of the Melanesia region, in the South Pacific Ocean.

I landed on the Kieta airstrip after twelve hours of weary travelling since leaving home, to see Steve and his friend Elizabeth waiting to greet me. Liz was smiling and friendly, and made me very welcome. She was from Buka Island in the north of Bougainville, and worked as a scientific analyst in the Environmental and Chemical Testing Laboratory for BCL (Bougainville Copper Limited). They were waiting inside the little tin shed which was Kieta Airport, and were such a welcome sight.

Steve was very glad to see me and said so, so many times it made it all worthwhile. I wondered how I would go with him as he'd changed his lifestyle so much since leaving Australia. His life was very remote on an island with far less rules and regulations than back in Australia, and there was a distinct element of danger all around, both at the mine site and in the jungles. However, he was in his element and nothing fazed him.

Steve, Elizabeth and I walked to his shining white Hilux 4WD Ute. It was his pride and joy. From an Esky in the back he pulled out

three wine glasses and three small bottles of wine to toast my arrival while we waited for my case to come through. It eventually arrived with the handle broken and wired up.

Steve gave me the keys and said his Ute was mine to drive whenever I wanted while I was there, and told me it was okay to drink and drive as there were no laws against it. So we drove along with our drinks, as 'Rocky III' played on the sound system.

Steve did, however, need to outline a few rules:

1) Don't go any further south than the airport without him, as the nationals down there weren't too hospitable.
2) Don't stand under a coconut tree as a hit on the head from a falling coconut will kill you!
3) Never open the door or go outside on your own after dark.

When I'd landed, we came in on an airstrip which ran parallel with the Pacific Ocean. The waves were crashing in on one side of the plane, while coconut palms swayed on the other. Now in Steve's Ute, we travelled along a road through an intensely beautiful paradise of dense tropical jungle and magnificent white sandy beaches. It was a natural wilderness where nothing was contrived. Small sac-sacs, which were huts made of sago palm leaves, were dotted along the sides of the road. Nationals wandered along in brightly coloured lap-laps, shorts or trousers, chewing their betel-nuts or drinking San Miguel beer. Everyone was so relaxed.

We stopped at a motel called the Davara where we had a quiet drink and chatted together about the future. We talked to an old man from Rabaul who had lived on Bougainville Island for fourteen years. His name was Fuji. He spoke of the war years and the invasion of the Japanese onto the island, the bombings and air raids. He spoke in pidgin, a blend of Melanesian and English, but I understood everything he said. He was the motel's

chef and said to come back on Friday as he was cooking Chinese food. We'd missed out, because last week he'd cooked up mud crabs and lobsters.

We left and went to the leave-house in Arawa where the three of us were to stay. The term leave-house is a form of house-sit while the permanent residents were away on leave.

The house was high set, with four bedrooms and fitted out inside with every convenience. There were double-deadlocked windows and doors, sealed off with wooden and iron bars. Fans and air conditioners ran day and night in every room.

We locked my case inside then went out again to visit Terry, an electrician in Section Five. He had been asleep for half an hour after a full work shift when we arrived. No problem; he showered and shaved and sat down to make plans for the evening's entertainment at the Coastal Club.

Dotted along the road to Panguna were painted skull and crossbones to mark where so many people had been killed in cars from going over the cliff while speeding and drink driving around the bends. This place was wild, where everyone worked hard and played hard, and they drank, a lot.

It was an extreme life in so many ways. The weather was hot and steamy. Every day at midday the rain came down in a wall of water. This humidity meant everything was damp *all the time*. Cuts and scratches never healed. One of Steve's mates got a fish hook caught in his leg and it became a terrible ulcerated mess. He had to fly back to Australia to have it treated.

Next stop was Steve's room in the mine complex at Panguna. It was very small. A bed, a table, a cupboard and two plants. Hanging on the wall were some arrows and a hand-carved comb which

his houseboy had given him. A coconut hung from the ceiling in a macramé sling.

The shared bathroom arrangements were down the hall. I am constantly blessed with good fortune, as the timing of the visit to see Steve's accommodations coincided with a sudden onset of a severe upset stomach, possibly caused by the change of water. A few people had arrived in Steve's room to be introduced to me. I whispered to Steve that I urgently had to get to the bathroom. When I returned, I turned scarlet with humiliation when one of the guys greeted me loudly, saying, "Have ya got a dose of the shits, love?" I did feel violently ill, and must have looked really washed out. The guy said, "Come with me." He took me out through the compound to the mess hall, and arranged for a bowl of plain cooked rice and a banana. He mashed the banana and mixed it into the rice. Handing it to me with a spoon, he said, "Here, eat this. Works every time." And it did. I began to feel much better quite quickly.

From there we went to the Coastal Club to meet the crew and have another drink. *Watership Down* played on the screen. This animated movie seemed too cute to be entertainment for a big group of burly, beer-swilling mining men.

I was terribly tired by this time and was so bushed I could hardly stand up. By the time we left, my head was ready to split with a terrific headache. Steve introduced me around to dozens of people, all fun, easy to talk to, natural and easygoing. We talked all the way back and I was very glad to find my bed when we got home.

It felt extremely hot due to the humidity, though it was only 32 degrees Celsius. I went to bed but couldn't sleep. I lay there worrying about things. Steve had told me he'd been attacked a little over a week ago. He had a huge scar across his scull where a national had smashed a chair over his head on New Year's Eve. He'd spent the night in hospital and had the stitches out the

following week, just before I arrived. The attacker had come at Steve from behind for no apparent reason and a brawl broke out. It was on for young and old. Seventy people fighting with bottles flying everywhere.

This gave me the 'dingbats', a term our father used to describe feelings of unease whenever I had a nightmare as a child. He'd come in and say, "Have you got the dingbats, sweetheart?"

Steve went on to emphasise the 'must nots' very strongly. I had to realise I was visiting a place where the indigenous customs and methods of dealing with things were completely different to anything I was used to.

4) If you're out driving with Liz and you hit a national on the road, keep going. If you stop to help, they'll come from nowhere and kill you—no questions asked. They're not interested in explanations about the fact that it was an accident or how it happened—you're dead! Payback killings are how they deal with things over here. The police can't help.

5) The same goes if you hit a pig. Pigs are their most prized possessions of great status and wealth. Therefore if you hit one, the nationals will be after you and if they don't kill or maim you, the cost to you in kina for compensation will be exorbitant.

I woke at 4:00 a.m. to the sound of someone getting up, and couldn't get back to sleep. The worries started again. I lay there thinking about the fact that I couldn't drink the water. What would happen if I got sick? Would there be expat doctors or national doctors in the hospitals? Steve had said, "You don't get sick on Bougainville—the hospitals aren't worth knowing about." What would I do with myself for two weeks? etc. … zzz

At last, morning came. At 6:00 a.m. Steve was banging and crashing through the kitchen as he always had. His normal start to the day.

My head still ached as I got up and went to join them for breakfast. I tried to explain my fears and the 'dingbats' of the night before but it seemed very melodramatic, and I couldn't describe the terrible apprehensions I had about being in a place where perhaps we didn't belong or weren't welcome.

I made my bed, had a shower, donned khaki shorts and a singlet, and prepared to start the day. Things seemed a little better in the light of day. After breakfast we left the house at 7:00 a.m. and got five minutes down the road (distance is only measured in time) when Steve had to turn around and go back as he'd forgotten the tow ropes. These were required as we would be travelling off road and through a lot of rivers.

We left the bitumen just past Kieta Airport (where I'd been told not to go on my own) and cut through country so remote that, according to Steve, "many tribes had never seen a white man". Throughout the course of the day we travelled over 320 kilometres of the roughest terrain I'd ever seen, and way off the beaten track.

Because it was Sunday, everyone was out, some walking to church in their bright 'Sundy-go-meetin' clothes, of sarongs, lap-laps and various clothing in the most vivid colour combinations. There weren't many smiles but hundreds of delayed waves. Many wanted a lift in Steve's flash car. Apparently "the third best on the island".

These people were untouched by Western ways and completely tribal before BCL came along. Steve described the simplicity of life, where children played by simply rolling a stone along the ground with a stick. Now there were transistor radios and old cars everywhere. It was nothing to see a standard Ute with up to twenty people sitting or standing up in the back, all sticking out of the tray like a porcupine.

Along the roadsides, nationals carried large black umbrellas, and many of the women and children smoked pipes. Some people carried huge banana leaves as umbrellas to shelter them from the sun and rain.

The further we went, the denser and darker the vegetation became. There was a pungent smell of leaves rotting on the jungle floor and I could almost taste the warm humidity of the air as I breathed it in. Mingled with this was the occasional whiff of wood smoke, possibly from village huts deep in the jungle.

We passed drum houses along the roadsides. These sacred ritual places were for men only, and were used for ceremonies such as male initiations, and a wide variety of communications. These were constructed as large, thatched roof shelters, above four or six tree trunk supports.

I was able to ascertain that inside were garamuts (slit drums), carved from felled trees or hollowed-out logs, and highly decorated with pigment and carved images. These were their most important instruments. Another was the kundu, an hourglass-shaped drum made of wood with a handle placed on its narrowest part, and snake or lizard skin as a membrane.

The Papuan people understood the drums sound as its 'voice'. This voice carried long distances to announce meetings, call individuals, issue warnings and even contact neighbouring villages. Communication occurred through a complex series of rhythms and tones, beaten out with a wooden stick by an initiated man. More than just an instrument, apart from its rhythmic qualities, each drum was central to the lives of the entire community. They were used as war drums, and to communicate a wide variety of practical messages in rituals of rank, daily life, births and deaths, and would likely include the arrival of strangers.

As we went deeper into the jungle, Steve rekindled my fears by saying that occasionally there were bandits with machetes or a shotgun who would block the road and hold people up for money. "Oh great!"

We pressed on. The day was getting hotter and very steamy. The scenery was magnificent with strangling vegetation growing everywhere. There were thousands of tall coconut and sago palms, mango, guava, banana and betel nut trees. Beautiful wild orchids, bougainvillea, staghorns and vines ran over everything and dripped from the trees. Strangely though, I saw no wildlife. No roadkill, no birds to speak of.

We passed landslides on a regular basis and areas where the road had been completely washed away by the raging rapids of flooding rivers which sent huge boulders crashing through in their wake and altering the topography in an everlasting bid to confuse.

At one point the road crossed a deep canyon with a thousand-foot drop on either side. The road had eroded so badly that there must have been literally inches to spare for vehicles to get across. I made the mistake of asking Steve to stop for a photo, which he did, right in the middle of it. My heart did backflips as I looked down, seeing nothing but air, to a tiny river which seemed like kilometres below. I closed my eyes and willed us out of there while screaming "keep going, keep going". That was one photograph I'd have to miss.

We must have made at least thirty river crossings, twenty of which we had to drive through. Fortunately for me, because Bougainville was currently experiencing a drought, the rivers were only up to the tops of the wheels at most. Though we did lift our bags and shoes off the floor in anticipation of an indoor paddle a couple of times.

There were several remnants of the Japanese occupation of Bougainville during WWII. We saw Admiral Yamamoto's Mitsubishi

bomber plane wreck, covered with vegetation where it stood in the jungle about three kilometres off the east coast road to the south of Arawa. It was about 25 kilometres north of Buin. This iconic relic lay rusting amongst the vines which undulated everywhere within the deep pockmarks of bomb craters, so deep we could stand up in them.

Admiral Yamamoto was famous as the mastermind behind the attack on Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. He was shot down here by US fighter planes on April 18, 1943. Many other terrestrial WWII relics littered the island, including several tanks and other aeroplanes, as well as sunken boats offshore.

We arrived at Buin where we cruised up and down looking for Charlie, a national who had gone back to his tribe from Panguna to stay with his people for the Saturday. Steve had told him that we would pick him up between 8:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. on Sunday morning at the marketplace. However, after having had a good look around, there was no sign of Charlie, so, deciding he must have found a lift back with someone else, we cut out on a narrow jungle path towards the Buin beach where we had a clear view of the Solomon Islands.

Steve pointed upwards, reminding me of the warning about falling coconuts as we were standing directly under fully laden trees which were around 60 feet high. “They’ll kill you if you’re hit on the head.”

We were standing on concrete platforms next to a rusted cannon. An expat who married a national and lived in one of the remote villages we’d passed through, told Steve that one of his children found a skeleton in the jungle where he lived. It still had the helmet sitting on the skull, and the remains of a rifle, minus the wooden butt which had long since rotted away.

We ate fresh pineapple which Liz had cut up to bring along, and drank Sprite lemonade and tonic water, then left the beach and

continued inland once again. Resting here and there in rivers, we sat on rocks where the rapids cooled our feet.

Liz talked about cannibalism. There was a story about the first priest who arrived in Buka. He was killed and eaten. They couldn't understand why his feet were so chewy and tough. They were eating his shoes.

History shows that warfare had been common across Bougainville in pre-European times. Groups of residential hamlets formed fighting units of variable composition depending on male leadership contingencies. In the regions of Buin, Buka and some of North Bougainville, leadership was hereditary, but mostly it was based on feats, such as giving feasts for large aggregations of people. In Buka and the far north of Bougainville, the victors engaged in cannibalism, while headhunting was common in the south.

Liz also described that, with the opening of BCL, highlanders from mainland Papua New Guinea would come across to Bougainville on one-way tickets, paid for by the pooling of money from their villages, and with a view to making money. However, they were unqualified, unemployable squatters who found once they arrived, they couldn't get work, but stayed anyway as they had no money to get back. They became rebels who resorted to stealing food and money from wherever and whoever they could get it, in order to live.

As we passed through every river, Steve and Liz related a different hair-raising story of the last time they did this trip at the peak of the rainy season when the rivers were in full flood. They'd navigated raging rapids to the deafening sound of large rocks crashing downstream as they went out one night after receiving word that one of Steve's workmates had lost his car in the river miles from Panguna. The message was relayed to Steve via the mission radio to Horst, the helicopter pilot who notified Steve's friend, Arthur Perry, at BCL.

Arthur, Steve and Liz left Panguna after a long shift at 8:00 p.m. and got back at 6:00 a.m. the next day, just in time to have a shower, eat at the mess and start work again at 7:00 a.m. Like I said, these guys worked hard and played hard! Their mate was grateful that they were able to winch the car out of the river and tow it back to Panguna. Liz said these events happened a lot. Sometimes people could be stuck for days waiting for help. Steve said that trip was very hairy. A wild event, where the car sometimes acted as a submarine. The sort of unforgettable experience he expected to eventually tell his grandchildren.

We travelled for another three hours through very rough, bumpy areas and arrived back at Panguna, to the vast area of the Bougainville copper mine which cut a swathe through the jungle.

There were mountains of slurry (crushed rock waste). Beside it was a river of pale-grey silt which flowed from the mine, and ran for 14 kilometres down through the gorge and spread to a width of a kilometre out to the sea. This grey delta was once the Jaba River.

The mine was a large physical scar on the landscape which implicated a deeper spiritual one in its early days for the people of the communities whose entire way of life was intensely affected. An immense 150,000 tonnes of rock waste and toxic tailings were spewed out, causing rivers to become dead zones.

Steve showed me around. As we drove in, he explained the weight carried by the massive B150 and B170 dump trucks, and told me that if I was driving, not to hesitate in their path as they would never be able to stop suddenly. Everything was enormous. Each dump truck alone looked like the size of a small house.

We saw the Drive House which housed the mountainous stock pile of rock. Steve worked at the B60 crushing plant. It was like hell. I've had previous nightmares about such places. We donned yellow

helmets and climbed the metal stairs to the top, then walked out on a mesh walkway to the crane. It was a giant horizontal moving platform which was a mechanical device moving back and forth across the crushing plant 60 feet above the vibrating conveyor belts carrying tons of rock.

The crushing plant was very, very noisy, dusty and 'high'. It was a vertigo sufferer's nightmare. I clung to the rail like a limpet, while Steve gave me the full verbal tour at a yell so he could be heard over the din. When the crane arrived at the opposite end, we were positioned above a massive conical funnel into which the reversing trucks tipped their loads of rock. It was terrifying. A handy disposal unit for mafia men!

As we returned to the start, I was glad to get off to climb down the stairs with trembling legs, and get back to the car.

Steve was very adaptable. He was never required to use his welding skills but was made responsible for the mechanical operation of the overhead cranes, which he kept ticking over meticulously. If there was a breakdown, it was up to him to call in the troops to work 36 hours if necessary to get the thing up and running. For every minute of non-operation the cost to the company could be up to $100,000 back then.

This job was often 'all on' or 'all off' which meant that between jobs there was a lot of down time, which Steve utilised by studying for his pilot's licence.

Back outside, Steve took my picture next to one of the dump trucks. I stood by its wheel and only came up to the hub cap!

We left the mine site and drove up to the "best house on the island" which turned out to be the home built for Sir Roderick Carnegie when he was the managing director of BCL. He no longer used it,

though it still operated for VIP banquet functions, cocktail parties and smorgasbords. It mostly sat vacant, looked after by Steve's friend Rod, who was the caretaker and who also took extra care of the 'bar'. He invited us in and mixed us gin and tonics. Very welcome after the long trip and tour of the crushing plant!

Liz showed me through the house. Upstairs were beautiful bedrooms with armchairs, carved tables and subdued lighting. Each bedroom had an ensuite. Each ensuite had an individual tiny courtyard, set with a sunken Roman bath with brass railings. All were exquisitely micro landscaped with stones and tropical plants. I was enchanted with the privilege of seeing it all.

Throughout the rooms were solid wooden cupboards with heaters inside to keep clothes dry and to keep the myriad of luxurious sheets and towels from becoming mildewed and musty in the humidity.

The huge bar downstairs was stocked with everything, including Orrefors and Waterford crystal glasses and decanters. The kitchen had huge cookers and storerooms full of bone china dinnerware, more crystal, and Le Creuset casserole and cookware for the banquet functions. This house had been a real treat to see. We chatted for another hour before returning to Panguna.

Everything to do with the mine site was BIG! We entered the miner's mess hall which was a vast labyrinth of tables and chairs. Trays of food stretched as far as the eye could see in an array of hot soups, roasted meats and vegetables, casseroles, pastas, cold meats, fish, salads, tropical fruits, cakes and slices, cheeses, condiments, apple pies and desserts with cream and custard, freshly squeezed tropical juices, tea and freshly brewed coffee.

The chefs worked in shifts around the clock to feed the hundreds of mine staff who filed through from their own shifts, day and night. Steve introduced me to one of the guys who was eating there as

his ‘twin’ sister. The guy said, “Crikey, mate, what happened to you? Were you hit by a steamroller?”

After dinner we went to the cricket club for a drink before heading back to Arawa to the leave-house. This was just my first day.

The next morning we called at the medical centre. I waited in the car. Steve went in to speak to the doctor who asked what seemed to be the problem? Steve said, “I think I’ve got malaria.” The doctor asked what his symptoms were. Steve said, “My sister’s visiting from Australia.” Steve arrived back at the car with a medical certificate for a few days off. The doc was pretty good like that. He’d write out a certificate even if someone wanted to go fishing.

I had some wonderful experiences on Bougainville. Driving all over the island visiting pristine beaches with miles of white sand, swaying coconut palms, and plantations of cocoa and copra. One of these was the Numa Numa plantation, the biggest in the Southern Hemisphere. It employed between 2000 and 4000 plantation workers from mainland New Guinea at various times and was so big it managed its affairs through its own bank and post office.

Steve took me up on helicopter flights to see jungles, villages and plantations from above. One flight was heart-stopping. The pilot was Horst. I think he must have been a bit crazy, because we flew directly towards the face of a mountain at speed. I braced myself for impact, when suddenly I felt a heavy gravitational force as we accelerated straight UP. My stomach and brain lurched. When I opened my eyes there was nothing below us. The land seemed to have dropped away to kilometres below us. Always the cool customer, Steve seemed unfazed. But this was another terrifying experience I would never forget.

We visited little islands by boat. I spent time with some children on a small fishing pontoon on one island, and became the object of

raucous laughter by the women on another as I walked through a jungle food market in Buka. I stood out like a sore thumb amongst the nationals.

The market was a huge shelter in the jungle, comprising four poles holding up a large thatched roof above tables of coconuts, breadfruits, avocados, aibika, choko, pumpkin tips, galip nuts, and a variety of tropical fruits, vegetables and live mud crabs, bound up with twine.

We visited the small village where Liz's family lived on Buka Island. They were terribly poor, with hardly any food due to the drought, but very hospitable, offering us breadfruit. We shared the meat from the crab Steve bought from the market. I gave them a bag of my clothes which I'd brought from home to donate to anyone who might need them. Though I wasn't sure if they could or would wear them in this steamy tropical heat.

We continued on to Kessa on the northern tip of Buka Island and swam in the sea. Huge shells sat amongst the sand along the shoreline, perfect and untouched.

Driving north, we went to the tip of Bougainville and across to a tiny island called Sohano, so small we could walk around it in about half an hour. We had to leave the car and cross the water on a ferry to get there.

Sohano Island was another paradise where we stayed overnight in a little guest house called Buka Luma Lodge, a family-run accommodation with a few rooms to one side of a central communal area. Comfortable easy chairs, couches and a single refectory table looked out over a small balcony with cushioned alcoves and beyond to a view of the beautiful waters of the Buka passage.

A chopper pilot was also staying there. His name was Gene. He was about to deliver some explosives to another island and invited

me to join him for part of the trip. He was not supposed to take passengers whilst carrying volatile explosives in the helicopter; however, things were very flexible in these remote parts in the 1980s. He would drop me in a location to wait for him to make the delivery, then pick me up on his return.

As I climbed in, Gene gave firm instructions that when I exited, I must ensure the seatbelt was secure and not to slam the door on it. He started the ignition and up we went, over the jungle, swooping down on crocodiles swimming in the rivers, dipping to see war wrecks, and eventually we descended to where he dropped me somewhere in a compound to wait for him to return. I had headphones on, but as we landed, his information and instructions cut out. I had no idea where I was, nor the dynamics of the people I may encounter. Nervously, I jumped out, slamming the door on the seatbelt. “Bugger.”

I was wearing a singlet and shorts, and all I carried was my large Minolta camera. Remembering the ‘sticky situation’ warnings from my boss, Mike Buxton, and backed up by my husband, I began to panic.

An ancient old man wandered through the jungle clearing, carrying a long spear. He stopped and stared at me as though I was an alien from outer space.

My heart pumped with panic as I walked with purpose past some official-looking buildings and down to the shoreline where an embankment shielded me from anyone who may have been able to see me. I sat down behind it with my hand over my watch so I couldn’t see the time tick by in slow motion, and worked out my strategies in case any attackers should come out of the jungle. I could run into the sea, but my camera would get wet. I could try to outrun them, but they had spears.

I'm not sure how long I was sitting there, freaking out in a cold sweat, when suddenly I looked up. Sixty feet above me soared a fully laden coconut tree. What should I do? Do I hedge my bets and move out from behind the embankment which shielded me from view, and on to the open beach? Do I chance the people from the buildings seeing, and possibly coming down to 'get' me? Or do I hope a coconut doesn't fall?

Suddenly, 'THWACK', the decision was made for me, as a huge coconut dropped from above and embedded itself in the sand right next to me. I crouched down and edged along the embankment, just as I heard the distant sound of the chopper returning. I ran back to the landing pad where Gene picked me up. In my nervy state, I slammed the door on the seat belt. "Bloody hell" I did it again. As we took off into the air I was on the brink of tears. Trying not to show my upset, I couldn't speak all the way back.

Later that afternoon, Gene joined us for gin and tonics on the veranda. Steve asked him where he'd left me. Gene explained that he had dropped me at a local government station, the friendliest place on the island. It turned out that if I had found any of the authorities, they would have treated me like a queen. But no one came to greet me as they probably thought I was a missionary. It was sad that no one knew I was there as I hid on the beach, terrified.

After more gin and tonics, Steve found some snorkel gear for Gene and the three of us, and we wandered down to the water, where, with no alternative route, we crunched our way across the coral to a drop-off.

Since writing this book, in all my years of travel through hundreds of world destinations, the best experience I've ever had was this time I spent with my brother in Bougainville, and the jewel within the jewel was an extraordinary experience of mind-blowing

wonderment, where for the next two hours we were carried along the most exquisite coral reef by the sea current.

This concentration of reef life sat one foot from our faces as we peered into and around things. We were entering a kaleidoscope of vivid colours within the silent and private world of a myriad of creatures as they went about their daily lives. This was indescribable. No documentary by Jacques Cousteau or David Attenborough could show what we experienced, because we were there.

Amongst thousands of the most intensely coloured corals and seaweeds were millions of what seemed to be fluorescent sea creatures, twinkling in every colour, pattern and shape imaginable.

Fish in their thousands flashed and glittered around us. There were shrimps, shellfish, crabs, octopuses, sea cucumbers, seahorses, stonefish and intensely blue starfish. Bright sea anemones in dazzlingly vivid colour combinations were mesmerising as they swayed in the current with their accompanying clownfish swimming inside them. An occasional black crown-of-thorns starfish fed on the coral.

At one point I watched a black-and-white-striped sea snake with a yellow head wind its way around my leg and swim away. Gene tugged on my foot and beckoned me up. Above the water he told me that it was one of the most venomous creatures on earth and if it had bitten me, I wouldn't have reached the shore. However, I wasn't bitten and was having the time of my life in complete euphoria. It was like a dream I never wanted to end.

I have searched the world for such a concentration of reef life ever since in the hope of experiencing something like it again, but nothing has even come close.

The following day, travelling back through the jungle, we were hit by a violent tropical storm. The ford we were about to cross

was covered by a tsunami of water which crashed down along the course of the river in a torrential wall of water, bringing large rocks and boulders and a huge tree trunk in its wake. The tree trunk lodged itself between the concrete ford and the rocks beneath it. This powerful force of surging water pushed it vertical, causing an avalanche of water to spew upwards and cascade out on either side. This was a phenomenal sight, a spectacular display of pure drama from Mother Nature herself. It was an image which stuck in my brain forever—too wet and wild to take a photograph.

We waited in the Hilux until almost dark before the water subsided enough for us to pass. Some missionaries came down to see if we'd like to come and wait it out in their huts, but Steve politely declined. I often wondered what their digs would have been like, but I knew Steve wouldn't have left his vehicle unattended in these parts. It was treacherous for so many reasons.

Years later, in 2012, there was a movie released called *Mr. Pip*. It was based on the book of the same name by Lloyd Jones and starred Hugh Laurie. The plot was set in 1989:

> *MISTER PIP:-*
>
> *~ As civil war raged on in the province of Bougainville, then called North Solomons, in Papua New Guinea. Mr. Watts, the only white man left on the island after a blockade, reopens the local school. The 'Redskins', an army sent to destroy the local rebels, are getting closer ~*

The movie was beautifully filmed but ended in shocking violence. It rocked me to the core, ending as this sweet, gentle teacher was attacked, chopped up with machetes and fed to the pigs. It stayed with me, unleashing the unease I'd felt when I first arrived. The later knowledge of how hated the white men must have been.

This movie described one story. But I came away with the further knowledge of what had been done.

The slurry I'd described earlier, flowing into the Jaba delta, was a silt of tailings from the mine. A toxic waste of chemical destruction which ran through what used to be abundant farmland and a freshwater river alive with fish, now lay waste. The tribesmen who lived on the lowlands were displaced and had to move to higher ground into other tribal territories where they didn't belong.

For many of the people, their land had been destroyed by BCL. The only dwellers who lived there now were crocodiles. The people's way of life was gone forever. There was never much compensation to the people of Bougainville, as the wealth in dollars and millions of kina went to mainland PNG to develop cities, and build highways into the highlands and other mine sites.

Having said this, the good things which came to Bougainville as a result of BCL during the mine's life between 1972 and 1989 were health services and education. As well, around 12,000 people were trained, including approximately 1,000 who completed full-trade apprenticeships and some 400 who completed graduate and post-graduate studies. During the mine's construction and development phase the demand for goods and services was in part met by the local community and this demand helped foster the development of various local enterprises.

The organisation of the mine's food-buying requirements, for example, through rural consolidated agencies opened up a lucrative market for garden-style cash crops.

Ancillary services functions also created new opportunities for local contractors in areas such as the provision of labour, transport, construction and security. Through the Bougainville Development Corporation there was also a focus on the fostering of mid-sized

ventures. Its areas of initiative included air services, steel fabrication, catering services, furniture manufacturing and livestock processing.

These days, leaders in the ABG (Autonomous Bougainville Government), and even external advisors, want to see the reopening of the Panguna mine as an impact project to kick-start the Bougainville economy. This once-lucrative open-cut mine has been abandoned for more than two decades and would need an estimated $8 to $10 billion investment to restart it. In addition to operational costs, any restart at Panguna would have to deal with demands for compensation from locals and expectations of an environmental clean-up around the mine site.

The possibility of conflict is a serious one considering the large number of weapons still on the island and the highly factionalised population.

Everywhere one travels in Bougainville these days there is urban decay, pothole-infested public roads and streets, fearful squatter settlements, massive unemployment, crime and an Asian takeover of cottage businesses.

If not for the BCL copper mine, I would never have seen this beautiful place or even really known of its existence. But I often wonder what it was like there before the 1970s when the tribal people lived their simple lives in the jungle.

If Steve was alive today and I thought it possible to return with any safety I'd go back without hesitation. Even in Bougainville's now derelict state, it must surely have returned to an organic abundance.

A trip into the wilds of anywhere beats the hell out of tourism any day as long as you're with someone savvy. This had been one of the wildest adventures I've ever had. There wasn't a minute when I hadn't felt safe in Steve's hands, and with never a dull moment.