

Going Places

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FROM THE DIRECTOR

Kiribati (pronounced Kiribas) is a place a traveler has to be determined to visit because it is difficult to get to. Air service to this Pacific island nation, which lies suspended across the equator between Micronesia and Polynesia, is limited, and reaching Kiribati involves stopovers in Fiji, Nauru, or the Marshalls. That is both good news and bad news. Travelers who do reach its atolls find a more traditional lifestyle than is found in the more frequently visited islands of the Pacific. Other good news is that the country is not littered with the detritus of more advanced civilizations largely because fewer goods are imported to this country resulting in less packaging and fewer obsolete or broken goods to throw away. While these are attractions to the visitor, local people may see most of these realities as negative features of their remote location.

The Seventh Meeting of the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP) was held in Kiribati on October 11-13, 1994. The twenty-six members of SPREP include all of the independent countries of the Pacific islands as well as

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A TA's Experience in Micronesia

by Elizabeth Caraker

After what seemed like a lifetime in the air, circling half the globe, our 727 jet began its fourth descent since we left Honolulu eight hours before. I never imagined there to be so many runways along the stretch of Pacific ocean between Hawaii and Guam. The Island Hopper, as this flight was called, certainly lived up to its name. Like the other landings, the ground came into view only moments before the plane's wheels touched the runway. To me, this landing felt different from previous ones. This time we were touching ground on the forty-square-mile volcanic island of Kosrae, FSM, where I would live for the next three months. As I

stepped through the exit door, the blast of hot, humid air was almost smothering.

My body felt as if it were being carried along by the thickness of the atmosphere. Once through the arrival gate, I and the other six technical assistants (TAs) who were also assigned projects on Kosrae were showered with welcoming handshakes and fragrant leis. I barely had time to say good-bye to the other TAs before we were all whisked away into separate pickups and chauffeured to our various new homes.

Good-byes are of little significance on such a tiny island of only 8,000 people. The farewell greeting in Kosraean translates to "see you later", which is a certainty. The first ride around the island that day still remains a vivid memory. The sights and sounds filled me with amazement and shock. All of my senses

were fully stimulated. Every piece of scenery was new to my eyes: the intense greenness of lush tropical flora which seemed to cover every inch of land, the beauty of the beaches and ocean, the houses varying from tiny flimsy thatch structures to sizeable buildings of concrete and glass,



Sarah Rosner-Finney

Elizabeth and friends in Kosrae

the people, lots of people and children everywhere, all with beautifully rich, dark skin. The Kosraeans were as curious about the newcomer as I was about them. My stares were matched, and even surpassed by longer stares that day and for the next ninety days until my departure. I have only been back in Eugene for two weeks, and I can still imagine the feeling of the moist heat and the fragrant smells of the island's flora in the breeze. In some ways it feels like I was on Kosrae yesterday, yet when I think about the physical distance and the cultural contrasts, it seems strange to be experiencing such vivid memories while here in Eugene. I

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Maradel Gale

*I-Kiribati women selling fish along the road**Continued from page 1*

territories and affiliated states—American Samoa, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Northern Mariana Islands, Tokelau, and Wallis and Futuna. Major donor states that are members include Australia, France, New Zealand, and the United States.

The agenda for this meeting of SPREP, the first to be held in Kiribati, included the adoption of many procedural papers and the endorsement of a range of position statements including implementation of the outcomes of the Barbados conference on Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. The meetings provided an opportunity for delegates to share information and to learn about new international programs and funding opportunities that may be available to assist local environmental programs. It was also an opportunity for Kiribati to demonstrate its gracious hospitality and showcase its natural beauty.

The Micronesia and South Pacific Program was invited to send a representative to observe the proceedings, which provided a number of new contacts in countries where the program has not yet worked. Most importantly, the meeting offered an opportunity to learn more about the environmental concerns and issues of

the island nations. A strong storm that swept across the island chain during the meeting demonstrated the very real concerns of the low atoll countries about global climate change and a rising sea level. Watching the waves build in the lagoon makes one aware of the fragility and exposure of these small countries and the degree to which they are at the mercy of the developed nations that contribute to global warming.

The SPREP organization, headquartered in Apia, Western Samoa, provided a very well-staffed, carefully planned conference, and demonstrated its importance as a regional organization that keeps its member nations informed on a wide variety of environmental issues.



Maradel Gale

went through just as severe a cultural shock coming back to school as I did arriving in Kosrae and settling into my new living and working environments there. I found it much easier to slow down to the Micronesian pace than to speed back up to the pace of a university graduate student. I shared my feelings of culture shock with Jason Krukeberg who spent the summer working for the Palau Visitor's Authority. He identified with the strange readjustment period a TA faces during the first few weeks of school. We discussed the major differences in perceptions of time efficiency and workloads between our lives here and our summers in Micronesia. This fall we both have workloads that are three times those we had over the summer. Completing a project in Micronesia poses different challenges from those we come to expect at school. We definitely needed the full three months to complete our projects. Jason reflected, "In Micronesia it just takes longer to get into it. They have a different work style and pace. It took me a good couple of weeks just to figure out what I needed to do and to define why I was there."

The relationships with our counterparts and skills transfer are important parts of the Technical Assistance Program. As TAs we were prepared to concentrate on skills transfer and work closely with our counterparts. The nature of my project allowed me to work with many different agencies within the state and municipal governments which gave me the chance to sharpen my own networking skills. I learned to be flexible and work within the parameters that existed when I first arrived, which differed from what I had expected. My counterpart was off island

for the first several weeks of the summer. This gave me the opportunity to transfer skills to my office staff who were eager to take advantage of my presence during their boss' absence. My counterpart eventually returned and was eager to make up for lost time. We completed our project together, following our work plan closely and accomplishing most of the goals we had defined. It was a busy summer and just the right

length for me both for completing the project and living on a tiny island. By the end, I was ready to go home. As my plate fills up for the term with class papers, internship projects and graduate teaching fellow projects, I think about the factors that allow me to accomplish ten times as much work here than I could during the thirteen weeks I was in Kosrae.

I would summarize the work challenges in Micronesia using three C's—communication, contacts, and culture. We discussed these issues last spring in our Experiencing

Crossing Cultures seminar, a required course for graduate students planning to apply for an assignment in the islands. Pacific islanders often communicate with each other indirectly. There are proper channels for gathering and relaying information and accomplishing tasks necessary for a TA to successfully complete a project. As a TA, I had to first learn these channels and find out who the key people were, which leads to the next issue: Contacts. My first three weeks were spent meeting various people in the Kosrae State government who would be available to provide the support I needed for my project. Vanessa Rudin, another TA who spent the summer on Kosrae, has the impression that contacts are made more easily there. In Kosrae, Vanessa experienced that "the communication link between Kosraeans can be very efficient. You could really pull a meeting together fast. Kosraeans have less formal standards than we do here. There may be more cultural protocol but people are more influential," when someone important speaks, everyone listens. Establishing these contacts is important, but without understanding the influence that the island's culture has on day to day operations, a TA neophyte could get very impatient and frustrated with the seemingly inefficient ways things get done. There is much more that goes on than the untrained eye observes. I found the best way to learn about the culture was to be

"It was a busy summer and just the right length for me both for completing the project and living on a tiny island."

patient, listen, observe and ask a lot of questions. Another challenge in the Micronesian culture is obtaining information, which is not offered freely.

Each person holds their knowledge close and does not relinquish it easily. In fact, some islanders believe that if you share all your knowledge, you will die. TAs have to be creative and ask questions that will lead to the bit of information that is needed. Sachiko Kataoka, a graduate student in economics, had a particularly challenging time with gathering information. Sachiko's job was to analyze the gross national product of

Palau for the Palau Office of Planning and Statistics. She recalls: "I spent my first three weeks just trying to figure out how to gather the information I needed for my report." Fortunately, after three weeks, someone in Sachiko's office finally opened a file drawer that contained all the notes and records used by the United Nations consultant who had gathered some of the data two years before.

My living situation on Kosrae was unique compared to the standard TA setup. Since most TA projects are hosted by centrally located government agencies, TAs usually stay near the government center. They usually live alone or share a house with other TAs on the island. I had made the request to live with a family in the tiny village of Utwa which is literally at the end of the road and on the opposite side of the island from the government center. Not only was my counterpart a member of this community, but the site of my project, a proposed Marine Park, was located adjacent to Utwa village. My counterpart's family were my hosts, and I lived with

the eight of them (mother, father and six children) in a very small house; a traditionally built thatched roof and mangrove timber structure. A week before I arrived my host father had built a wall, dividing the one-room house into two and presto, my bedroom was created. The thatch design invited a constant movement of air which kept me cool. The kids played outside most of the time so my room was quiet enough to provide me with the privacy I needed. My host mother was so gracious and concerned with my comfort that I had no complaints. I had never experienced such hospitality before. Kosraeans take genuine pride in serving and taking care of their guests.

Utwa faces the windward side of Kosrae, receiving a continuous breeze which keeps the heat and humidity to a tolerable level. From my room I could see and hear the ocean waves crashing on the fringing reef. In two minutes I could walk down to the end of the breakwater and have a view of the sunset over the surf, the mangroves, and the steep, pointed volcanic mountain peaks, all from one spot. On the way home from my walk I could check out the catch of the day at the local fish market. By the end of my three-



Elizabeth Caraker and Betra Majmajo

month stay I had been accepted into the community and became familiar with the culture in a way that I could not have experienced living in government housing. I now have an adopted Kosraean family who is a permanent part of me, as Kosrae, every last tiny green patch of it, is also a part of who I am.

MSPP Technical Assistance Program

Cross-cultural Couple Crosses New Cultural Boundary

David and Hedi Shehigian spent the summer on the Micronesian island of Kosrae. They worked on projects with two agencies: the Kosrae Sports Council and the Community Development Office. While the program has occasionally assigned teams of technical assistants to work together on one project, and there are other husband-wife teams, it was the first husband-wife team to work on two projects.



David and Hedi Shehigian

David's background includes stints as a Peace Corps training director in Latvia, Hungary, the Solomon Islands, and the Philippines. While in Hungary, he met Hedi Marosfalvi, a Hungarian who was serving as a language and cultural trainer for the Peace Corps. Within a year, Hedi had joined David in New Jersey, where they were married. Then David came to graduate school at the University of Oregon, and Hedi began to make her home in Oregon. In the middle of this cross-cultural adjustment for Hedi, David applied for and was accepted in the Micronesia and South Pacific Program.

Both David and Hedi participated in the orientation course, which is required for technical assistants, and it became apparent that Hedi would be an active part of the Shehigian team in the field.

For David, the adjustment to Kosrae meant crossing from the American culture to the Kosraean one; for Hedi, it meant integrating first into the American culture and then moving into the Kosraean culture. "I actually find it easier to feel comfortable with Kosraeans than with Americans," was Hedi's response to queries about her adjustment in Kosrae. She cited the sharing and community-minded focus of the Kosraeans as a reason for this ease of adjustment. Hedi was raised in a rural, agricultural community with similar characteristics.

The Shehigian team worked on developing a sports program for the state of Kosrae for the Sports Council. And they had three counterparts at the Community Development Office where they assisted with the development of sector plans for women's programs, youth development, and the elderly. Both David and Hedi report having an excellent Kosrae experience and are back at the University of Oregon where David is finishing work on his master's degree in South East Asian and Pacific Islands studies.

Nancy Peyron Joins MSPP

In September, Nancy Peyron joined the Micronesia and South Pacific Program to coordinate the various activities of the Technical Assistance (TA) Program and to assist with overall development of the organization as it grows.

One of the challenges facing Peyron is publicizing the technical assistance program, which is beginning its seventh year. "This is one of the best internship opportunities on the West Coast, and we're interested in becoming much better known around campus," she says. To that end, program staff members have visited a variety of classes in planning,

public policy and management; education; architecture; landscape architecture; international studies; computer and information science; geography; and anthropology and talked to students about the program. All prospective TAs must take Experiencing Crossing Cultures (PPPM 626), which is offered winter term at the university.



Nancy Peyron

"Returning TAs tell me they found their island experience to be extremely valuable—both professionally and personally. In some cases, it has been transforming," Peyron noted. "We want to expand the base of potential TAs we have to draw from," explains Peyron. "Some students want to participate in the program, but find it difficult to take three months out of their busy lives to travel halfway around the world for a cross-cultural experience."

Even though she is a newcomer to the program, Peyron believes this job is a perfect fit for her professional and personal goals. At the age of thirty-seven, she returned to school at the University of Oregon and majored in international studies. This year she is completing graduate studies in organizational development. She loves to travel and welcomes the opportunity to explore new cultures and connect with people in other parts of the world.

Peyron's office in 130 Hendricks Hall is usually abuzz with activity, and her telephone rings often. Whether you are with an agency in the Pacific in need of a technical assistant or a graduate student inquiring about becoming a TA, Peyron is the person to contact; telephone (503) 346-1425.

The Counterpart Connection

The goal of the UO Micronesia and South Pacific Program's Technical Assistance Program is to facilitate a transfer of skills during the course of our projects. During work in the Pacific islands, we have noted the relative lack of skilled middle-management personnel in the government agencies. For this reason the Technical Assistance Program places great emphasis on the role of the technical assistant's counterpart, who is chosen by the agency that has requested assistance. The counterpart is expected to work day to day with the technical assistant, a relationship that facilitates a two-way transfer of information and skills. The technical assistant learns about local culture and, with the assistance of the counterpart, is able to determine what approach works for a particular island. The counterpart learns skills necessary

for the project, such as the way to develop a work plan and the techniques needed to implement the plan. In the best circumstances, the TA and the counterpart work together very closely, often developing a friendship that transcends the work setting.

Unfortunately, the counterpart connection can often be the weak part in the Technical Assistance Program. Most agencies in the Pacific have experienced consultants who come to conduct a project, spend a week or two on an island, and then return to their home office to develop a report and send it to the island. In this type of consultation, there is no expectation of sustained local input. The MSPP often finds it is battling this stereotype of technical assistance when requesting the involvement of a full-time counterpart. Our educational process continues on the counterpart connection.

with other people than he was in the past. He knows that while his colleagues at the college will find this acceptable, he cannot be as direct with members of his home community. Mwoakilese people are constrained from asserting their individuality as it tends to disrupt community cohesiveness.

A member of the social studies faculty at the College of Micronesia-FSM, Mel plans to design some new courses based on his recent studies. Knowledge gained while writing his master's thesis, "Toward a Sustainable Future for a Small Island Community: Pohnpei" will help him create a course about sustainable development. Reflecting on his home islands, Mel said, "If our way of life is self-sufficient and comfortable, why should we change? Other ways of life are not sustainable in our island environments. People need to think more clearly about what we are adopting from the larger cultures."

Accompanying Mel during his sojourn in Eugene were his wife, Karlina, and their three children: Alexandra, then age thirteen; Graham, eleven; and Beverly, nine. The children attended Eugene public schools, where they quickly adapted to

University Affiliation Program

The University of the South Pacific, Fiji

In July, Program Director Maradel Gale visited the University of the South Pacific (USP) to participate in the transfer of responsibility for the USP end of the linkage from Bob Briscoe, School of Social and Economic Development, to Adele Jones, School of Humanities. Briscoe, who concluded his contract with USP, is working with the International Labor Office in Fiji.

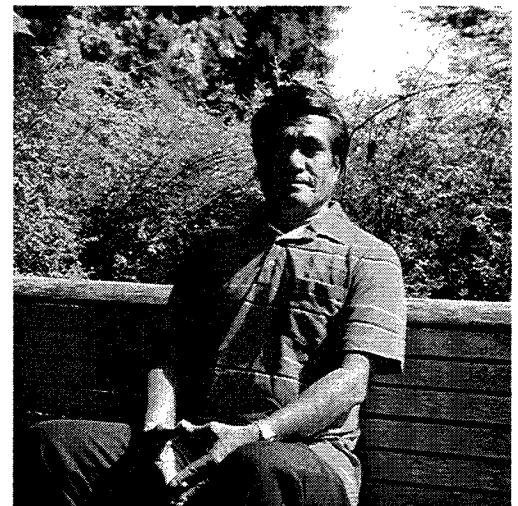
Jones, who has been active in nonformal education for a number of years, is a logical choice to oversee the USP end of the linkage program. The program's objective is to foster an interest in and capacity for experiential education in several areas of study at USP. In particular, Development Studies, Nonformal Education, and Community Development are targeted for inclusion in a program

that will place teams of students in the field to work on identified problems under the guidance of USP faculty members.

University of Oregon Professor Bryan Downes, in residence at USP during October and November 1994, will help establish this new program.

The College of Micronesia-FSM

After two years of study at the UO, Melchior Henry earned a master's degree in international studies. Interviewed shortly before returning to his home on Pohnpei, Mel, who is from Mwoakilloa, a Pohnpei outlying island, reported that he had learned a great deal more than he expected to during his time at the UO. "I came for a degree, and I learned a lot more, especially about myself. Particularly, I learned to be more frank." Mel feels he will be more direct



Mel Henry

the American culture. This process was aided by the children's excellent grounding in English, learned in the private schools they attended in Pohnpei. Karlina took some classes at the University of Oregon during their time in Eugene.

Where Are They Now?

Tom Graham arrived in Palau in mid-April. He has moved from Saipan in the Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas, where he spent a year and a half with the government Division of Fish and Wildlife. He is now a marine biologist with the Division of Marine Resources in the Republic of Palau. Tom works on two new projects. One project measures sedimentation rates on the reef to determine how land-clearing activities on the island affect the reef. Working with him during the summer was Kevin Polloi, an intern from the University of Hawaii, Hilo. The second project uses traditional knowledge of grouper behavior to locate spawning aggregations, which can then be monitored over time to discover variations in the population of these fish. Tom can be reached at the Palau Division of Marine Resources, PO Box 100, Koror, Republic of Palau 96940.

Holly Freifeld is the new territorial biologist for American Samoa. She is working with the Department of Marine and Wildlife Resources, conducting a census of bird species in the islands of American Samoa. When she is not scrambling around in the jungle and mountains of Tutuila, Holly can be reached at PO Box 3730, Pago Pago, American Samoa 96799.

Liz Matthews recently returned to the Pacific islands, this time to Fiji. Liz is a Fulbright Scholar, conducting research through the University of the South Pacific Ocean Resources Management Program. For the next ten months she will analyze fisheries development projects to ascertain the effects on women as well as to see how women are incorporated into the projects. Her research involves field work in Fiji. Liz is ideally suited for this research, having designed and conducted a similar project in Palau as a technical assistant in 1991. Liz's address is Ocean Resources Management, University of the South Pacific, PO Box 1168, Suva, Fiji.

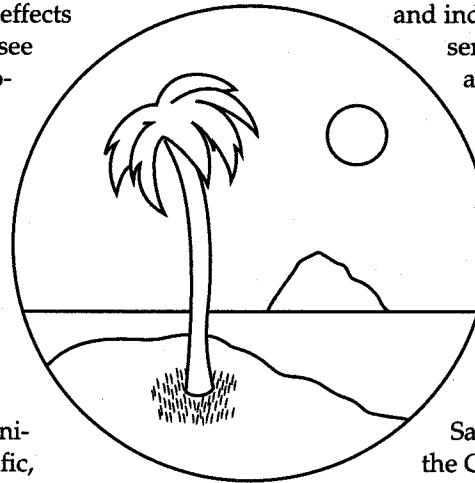
Larry and Leigh Ward, along with Tom Graham, were the first University of Oregon technical assistants to work in Yap. Larry is finishing his contract with the Coastal Management Program in Pago Pago, American Samoa, and plans to return to the United States.

Ron Moroni lives in Pohnpei, where he practices law and planning, having degrees in both professions. Ron's firm is called PIPCO, and he is involved with feasibility studies, land use, business plan development, and other useful services to island governments, businesses, and individuals. Ron

served as a technical assistant to the Majuro Atoll Local Government, working on land use planning. Ron's mailing address is PO Box PS 126, Palikir, Pohnpei, FSM 96941.

Eric Gilman is on Saipan, working for the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands

Department of Natural Resources as a natural resource planner for the next two years. He arrived on the island at the end of September and is getting acclimated to a very different environment from that of Pohnpei, where he served as a technical assistant. Eric's address is PPP 171, Box 10000, Saipan, MP 96950-9504.



Going Places

This edition of *Going Places* was edited by Maradel Gale, MSPP director. Articles were written by Gale, Elizabeth Caraker, and Nancy Peyron.

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