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Micronesia and South Pacific Program  
5244 University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403 USA  
(541) 346-3815; FAX (541) 346-2040  
[mspp@darkwing.uoregon.edu](mailto:mspp@darkwing.uoregon.edu)

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# Munching in the Marshalls

by Kit Cottrell



Living and working in the Marshall Islands for three months was very much like eating a meal different from anything else I'd ever tasted. This dish was full of unexpected and seemingly conflicting flavors. The recipe included spices from such diverse places as Japan, New Zealand, Australia, China, the Philippines, Canada, and the United States all served up the Marshallese way, casually, with the waitress

certainly in no hurry to bring your food. Yes, the flavor was unusual, but not unappealing. In fact, over time I developed a real taste for the unexpected. What follows is a description of some of my very favorite Marshallese entries and the places where I was fortunate enough to sample them.

## Majuro--Lobster in the Alley

Majuro, the capital of the Marshall Islands and home to 50 percent of its population, is a busy and bustling thirty-mile sand bar full of taxis, schools, restaurants, and people. Life along the main road (practically the only road) was never dull. The road was constantly lined with people talking, children playing, wild dogs barking, and an occasional frolicking pig. Despite the relaxed pace of life in the Marshall Islands, on Majuro it always appeared as if everybody was



going somewhere. Shopping, laundry, and visiting friends are more than just chores or pastimes in the Marshallese culture: they are woven into the very fabric of everyday life. One of my favorite places to spend my free nights in Majuro was PJs bowling alley and lounge. The bowling alley was a beautiful facility. Ten lanes with computerized scoring and plenty of Budweiser on hand. It was very American, or so I thought. One night after my supervisor and I bowled a couple of frames, the waitresses began to bring out enormous platters of food. As I began to salivate over the mounds of lobster in garlic sauce, yellow-tail sashimi, fried vegetable rolls, and calamari, my first thought was, This isn't your typical bowling alley cuisine! After the buffet had been laid out, an older

man announced to all of us that it was his birthday, and all were welcome to come and join the feast.

I was given a special place in line, and as I served myself a plate of this fantastic fare, I thought, This is how a birthday should be. Birthdays shouldn't just be for an individual, but shared by everyone present. After all, isn't every day a good day for us to stop and rejoice in the festival of life? The Marshallese certainly think so.

As I ate among this smiling and joking group of strangers, I realized that this seemingly exotic meal actually had a very pleasant and familiar flavor. It tasted of community and sharing.

### **Wotje--Bounty in a Basket**

Wotje atoll is an outer island in the Marshall Islands located about 150 miles north of Majuro. Most of the outer islands, Wotje included, have no electricity, running water, or automobiles and are very sparsely inhabited. I found this absence of western amenities quite refreshing. The people of Wotje are lively and seem content living their traditional way of life. On Wotje everyone smiles and says, Yokwe! meaning hello, to each and every passerby. One needn't earn much money there because fresh fish, crab, coconuts, and breadfruit are always abundant.

One Saturday evening on Wotje, I went with some friends to watch a video of *The Lion King*. Nearly the whole population of Wotje gathered around the small video screen beneath the brilliant night sky to bask in the splendor of this Walt Disney masterpiece. It was a very entertaining film, but I grew hungry before it was finished and headed back to my house to see if I could find something to eat. Just as I was entering the house, my friend Labuk stopped me and said, Hey man, I think you will find a surprise in there left for you by some visitors to the island. I entered the house to find a basket woven out of coconut leaves full of breadfruit, pandanus, steamed nuts, and a roasted chicken.

As I sat alone, devouring the banquet by the light of a lantern, I savored not just the food, but the warmth of generosity and kindness.

### **Arno--Cream of the Coconut**

I fell in love with Arno the moment I arrived. Just fifteen miles from Majuro, the rocky and pristine beaches of Arno beckoned me as I approached by boat. I was amazed that Arno could be so close and yet so different from Majuro. The people of Arno live a traditional life as they do on Wotje, but there is a certain peacefulness on Arno that I had not previously encountered. Arno is dense with jungle and flowering trees. Its deep turquoise lagoon is bordered by an immaculate white sand beach that curves toward the horizon and finally out of sight. This beach was my home for two weeks, and I didn't want to leave.

I was fortunate to get to know my counterpart and several of my coworkers on Arno very well. We passed the days working in the farm fields, touring the surrounding islands, and conversing about pressing international issues such as the way that Cracker Jack is made and the passing of sports legend Mickey Mantle. Each season at the first harvest, certain people are responsible for preparing a banquet for the island chief. One of my coworkers rented land from the chief and therefore was expected to prepare a banquet. So we all pitched in one day preparing sautied breadfruit, baked pandanus, fresh cooked pork, and hundreds of coconuts for the chief. It was, in truth, a lot of fun, but we figured after all our hard work we were entitled to sample this smorgasbord ourselves.



As I sat among these gentle, peaceful people, I tasted a flavor more fulfilling than any I had sampled previously this summer. It was the unmistakable taste of friendship.

*Kit Cottrell is a second-year graduate student in the Community and Regional Planning Program at the University of Oregon. Kit spent three months working on an agricultural resource and management plan with the Department of Agriculture in the Republic of the Marshall Islands.*

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Micronesia and South Pacific Program  
5244 University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403 USA  
(541) 346-3815; FAX (541) 346-2040  
[mspp@darkwing.uoregon.edu](mailto:mspp@darkwing.uoregon.edu)

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# Changes in U.S. Government Affect Island Affairs

by Maradel K. Gale, Director, MSPP

In February discussions by some members in the U.S. Congress to abolish the position of assistant secretary of the interior for territorial and international affairs were preempted by a move by the department itself. Assistant Secretary Leslie Turner announced the closure of the Office of Territorial and International Affairs (OTIA) and the discontinuation of the position of assistant secretary. The remnants of the pool of experts on island affairs are now located in the Office of Insular Affairs in the Secretary of the Interiors office.



Other agencies of the U.S. government are also diminishing their presence in the Pacific. The U.S. Information Agency recently closed its U.S. Information Service office in Fiji, leaving the region devoid of U.S.I.A. representation. Fiji was the last outpost since the closure several years ago of the Pacific Islands Programs Office in Honolulu. Similarly, in recent years the U.S. Agency for International Development

Office in Fiji closed.

There remain embassies in Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Marshall Islands. However, these are staffed by foreign-service personnel, who are assigned to a post for only two years before moving to another location. While this policy encourages the maintenance of an outside perspective on the part of the chief of the delegation, it also means there may be little long-term understanding of the culture and issues of the country in which the U.S. is represented.

Within the Pacific Islands Affairs office of the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., the personnel turnover is also rapid. In one year, three out of five staff members have been assigned to other regions. This quick turnover and phasing out of offices is problematic as it weakens the collective memory of United States-Pacific Island relationships and development programs. Some continuity had been supplied by knowledgeable staff members in OTIA, which, as discussed earlier, has been greatly diminished. It would be interesting to know the reasons behind this rapid reduction of U.S. interest in the Pacific. Perhaps it is due to the diminution of strategic importance of the region as the Cold War came to an end. If that is the case, it is a sad commentary that the United States is turning its back on the region and people who suffered so during World War II and for which so many American servicemen and women died. The United States became a very active influence in the development of the islands of Micronesia through the establishment of the Trust Territories of the Pacific Islands. The

abruptness of this withdrawal, before the conclusion of the terms of the Compacts of Free Association, is unfortunate. It is a disservice to the people of the region and to the hard work and efforts of the many people who served in this region during the trusteeship.

# MSPP Booklet Evaluates Costs of Tourism

Reports published on our technical assistance projects have limited distribution. They can be found at the University of Hawaii Pacific Collection, the College of Micronesia Library and the University of Oregon's Knight Library, in addition to the agency for which they were produced.

This fall the Micronesia and South Pacific Program, in conjunction with its consulting division, the Sustainable Development Group, published its first widely distributed publication, *Sea of Change: Island Tourism* by Kathleen Roos and Maradel Gale. This booklet about managing development of a tourist economy is an outgrowth of the thesis written by Kathy Roos for her masters degree in environmental studies at the University of Oregon. The twenty-four-page booklet is illustrated with photographs from the islands of the Pacific and will be distributed to government agencies throughout the Pacific islands. The booklet may be obtained from the MSPP for \$12 a copy.

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(541) 346-3815; FAX (541) 346-2040  
[mspp@darkwing.uoregon.edu](mailto:mspp@darkwing.uoregon.edu)

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# World Wide Web Home Page

*by Pat French*

In January 1995 the Micronesia and South Pacific Program went global on the Internet with its own home page. Having a site on the World Wide Web allows us to offer information about our programs to the rest of the world. Anyone who has access to the Web can search for sites with information about Micronesia, and they will be directed to the MSPP home page. Many people have found their way to our home page from countries as far away as Israel, Switzerland, China, Italy, and South Africa. Information about several MSPP programs can be found on the home page, along with Going Places (the program newsletter, which is published several times a year) and information about MSPP staff members. Our home page also links people to other pages that offer information about Micronesia. Clint Chiavarini, the creator of our home page, and a technical assistant with the program, frequently updates our Web site, adding more bells and whistles whenever the spirit moves him. You can find us on the Web at <http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~mspp/mspp.html>.

*Pat French works in the Micronesia and South Pacific Program office. She is a first-year graduate student in the Community and Regional Planning Program at the University of Oregon. You can learn more about Pat and the rest of our staff on our home page.*

# The Legacy of Janet McCoy

Janet McCoy was the last high commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. She served in that position from 1981 until she became assistant secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior for Territorial and International Affairs. Following her retirement in 1988, she moved to the rural community of Scottsburg on the Umpqua River in western Oregon. Over the years, Janet became a friend and supporter of the Micronesia and South Pacific Program, sharing ideas with the staff. It is with sadness that we report her passing on August 4, 1995.

Throughout her life, Janet was a groundbreaker. She was selected as one of the first officer candidates in the Womens Army Auxiliary Corps during World War II and served as a second and first lieutenant. Following the war, Janet worked in radio and television broadcasting in the Los Angeles area. She later became active in the travel industry and was executive director of the Western America Convention and Travel Institute. Janets advice and friendship will be missed by the MSPP.

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# Moe's Funeral

*by Eldon Haines*

*Editors comments. The interactions of technical assistants and their counterparts range from the professional to the social and in each case involve opportunities for the exchange of cultural information between the two parties. Eldon has worked as a TA in Palau and Samoa. His counterpart for one project was to have been Masua. However, just as Eldon arrived, Masua departed to seek medical care in Hawaii for her daughter Moe. This article describes Eldons observations at the funeral for the girl. Fine mats are large, finely woven pandanus floor mats, decorated with brightly dyed chicken feathers woven into the hem. They are prized by families and carry in their exchange the family's respect and appreciation for the receiver.*

Moe was eleven, experiencing the first signs of young womanhood. She and her mother, Masua, had been living with Moe's brain tumor since the girl was six. Masua was to have worked with me on the energy conservation seminars, but instead she and Moe spent the summer in and out of Tripler Hospital in Honolulu, first for the brain surgery, then the long recovery, physical therapy, and preparation for chemotherapy. They had been through all this four years before. Moe remained in a semi-coma much of the summer, responding only weakly to attempts to strengthen her for chemotherapy. An early August CT-scan showed that much of the tumor had quickly grown back. With little hope remaining, Masua and Moe came home to Samoa on a Monday-night flight. Moe died Wednesday afternoon.

In this warm, moist climate, the dead are kept in the hospitals refrigerated morgue until the day of burial. Masua's family is scattered from New Zealand to California. Because of difficult flight reservations and only two flights a week from Honolulu, Moe's funeral was delayed until the next Wednesday.

On Tuesday I was invited by my office colleagues Faalua, Saili, and Pele to join them in taking our offices gift of money and a fine mat to Masua. We had gathered money from each employee, a Samoan tradition, to demonstrate our respect and love for the family. The fine mat was a special gift from Faalua a special type of mat that is given to a parent who has lost a child.

In order to get to Masua's front door we had to walk around Moe's newly dug grave. Most houses, or fales, have at least one, and in some cases several, well-kept graves near the front door. Usually a shade, or sometimes an elaborate building covers the grave. One often sees people sitting or lying down for a nap on the cool grave, near the loved ones. Moe's grave consisted of a poured-concrete platform surrounding a concrete grave wall which extended from the bottom of the shallow grave to six inches above the platform. To my surprise, the interior of the wall was being carefully lined with two-inch square white tiles. The top of the wall was covered with white tile, trimmed in black. A heavy concrete cap lying nearby was to be sealed over the top after Moe's casket was placed inside. It occurred to me that, while in our colder climate in the US we want to be sure

our dead stay warm, the Samoans want to be sure their dead stay dry.

We were invited into a small meeting room with no furniture, but the floor was covered with common pandanus mats. I sat in the corner in my borrowed lavalava, the traditional wrap-around skirt worn by men and women alike, folding my legs under me so that the soles of my bare feet were respectfully pointed away from our hosts. Faalua sat to my right, Saili and Pele against another wall to my left. Across the room were seated Masua's mother, Masua, and a Talking Matai who is Masua's uncle. The meeting began with a formal greeting from the Matai, and Faalua responded with our groups greeting and message of respect and condolence. Pele laid the envelope containing the money on the mat in front of Masua, who immediately counted the money. Pele and Saili unfolded the fine mat and swept it across the room toward the Matai, then immediately folded it and placed it in front of Masua while Faalua's speech continued. The Matai responded that in Samoan tradition a fine mat given to the parent of a dead child must be returned; two women materialized from the next room, unfolded the fine mat, swept it toward Faalua, then folded it and laid it down. Masua also returned half of the money gift. Speechmaking continued, Faalua arguing urgently that our great respect for the family out-weighed tradition and that the fine mat and money should stay with the bereaved family. The fine mat was again unfolded, swept across the room, and folded, and the returned money again laid before Masua. The Matai spoke again with greater emotion, reluctantly accepting the money, but insisting that the tradition of the fine mat not be broken; again it swept across the room to Faalua. He accepted it with words of appreciation, and the exchange ended so I thought. We all rose and filed past the three hosts, giving words of thanks and encouragement. When we returned to the car we found that Masua's relatives had filled it with cases of mackerel, buckets of corned beef, prepared meals for the whole office, a whole roast pig, and a different fine mat. In the feast back at the office, where the food was divided up, I was given the fine mat. I nearly cried.

The funeral was held the next day in a small church, decorated for Moe with flowers, wreaths, and banners. We all stood for the procession, which brought Moe's casket up the aisle to the front, and stood again at the end when she was taken back out to the hearse. The walls of the church were screen wire and the roof corrugated iron, so we sat in the light breeze through the two hours of singing and exchanges, sweating lightly, listening as well to the children playing nearby, the roosters crowing, the dogs barking, and the blessed tropical rain on the roof.

# Technical Assistance

## An Agency Supervisor's Viewpoint

Interview with Youser Anson

by Elizabeth Caraker

In the past five years, the Pohnpei State Tourist Commission has requested and received four technical assistants (TAs) from the Micronesia and South Pacific Program. The major purpose of the commission is to promote Pohnpei as a tourist destination. Although each of the projects defined in the commissions requests for assistance have been oriented toward promotion and marketing, the commission benefited from the assignments by acquiring a wide variety of skills over the years.

Youser Anson, executive director of the tourist commission and supervisor to each of the TAs, requested technical assistance with skills he felt were lacking in his office, designing projects around areas that needed improvement. For each project Youser selected the member of his staff whose skills would benefit the most from working with the technical assistant.

From his experience Youser thinks the best TA-counterpart team is created when participants spend more than twenty hours a week together. In order to build a solid relationship, the TA and counterpart need to learn about each others cultural differences, thought processes, and work habits. Youser believes the relationship that develops between team members fosters an environment of confidence and motivation that leads to successful skills transfer and project results.

Tourist commission staff members continue to use and develop the skills they acquired from the TAs. Practical skills, such as computer processing, designing and updating brochures, and customer service, seem to transfer most successfully. In 1993 one TA created a site development plan to which Youser regularly refers for prioritizing site development and designing annual budgets.

Youser has seen his office mature and develop during his four-year term as executive director. Much of this progress he attributes to the presence of the TAs, who have provided fresh perspectives. They open our eyes to what we are doing, he says. Each member of his office staff has had the opportunity to work with a TA, and Youser claims that the transferred skills have increased the offices overall ability to serve its main objective: providing services to the visitor.



*Elizabeth Caraker recently received her masters degree in community and regional planning from the University of Oregon. She headed a team of three technical assistants who worked on a land use planning project in Pohnpei. Elizabeth resides in*

*Pohnpei, where she continues her work for the MSPP.*

# SEEKING: Pacific Island Agencies Wanting Technical Assistance

It's that time of the year again! In November and December, the Micronesia and South Pacific Technical Assistance Program identifies agencies in the Pacific islands that are interested in receiving technical assistance through our program. The typical project is one that can be completed during a three-month period. To be considered for participation in the program, agencies need to (1) define a project, (2) identify a counterpart in the agency who will work with the technical assistant for more than twenty hours a week, and (3) agree to provide housing for the technical assistant and cover any project-related expenses. The MSPP covers airfare for the technical assistant and provides an allowance for meals while technical assistants are on the job. Agencies that want to participate in the program or that need more information may contact Maradel Gale, Director, Micronesia and South Pacific Program, 5244 University of Oregon, Eugene OR 97403-5244, USA; telephone (541) 346-3815; fax (541) 346-2040; E-mail [mkgale@oregon.uoregon.edu](mailto:mkgale@oregon.uoregon.edu)



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If you are haven't experienced the MSPP and want to learn more about it, we can put you in contact with supervisors and counterparts in agencies in your region who have worked with our outstanding advanced graduate students. Let us hear from you with your interesting project ideas.



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5244 University of Oregon  
Eugene, Oregon 97403 USA  
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