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Welcome aboard,

Sepik River carvers, world renowned for their artistry, are featured in this issue. We sail on the fabulous Sepik Spirit which is taking travellers in great comfort and luxury to the remote villages of the carvers.

We also examine two vastly different forms of diving – the death defying land divers of Pentecost Island, Vanuatu, and the brilliantly skilled spear fishermen of Muschu Island, PNG.

Enjoy your flight.



Mr Joseph J. Tauvasa, MBE
Chairman
National Airline Commission



Mr Joseph J. Tauvasa, MBE

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Cover: Fishermen's outrigger canoes, Muschu Island. Photograph by Joe LoBasso.

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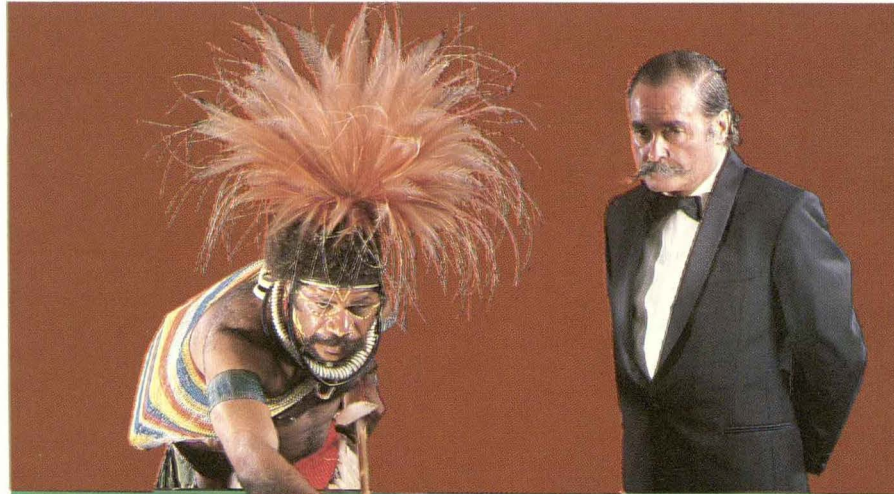
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TIDIKAWA

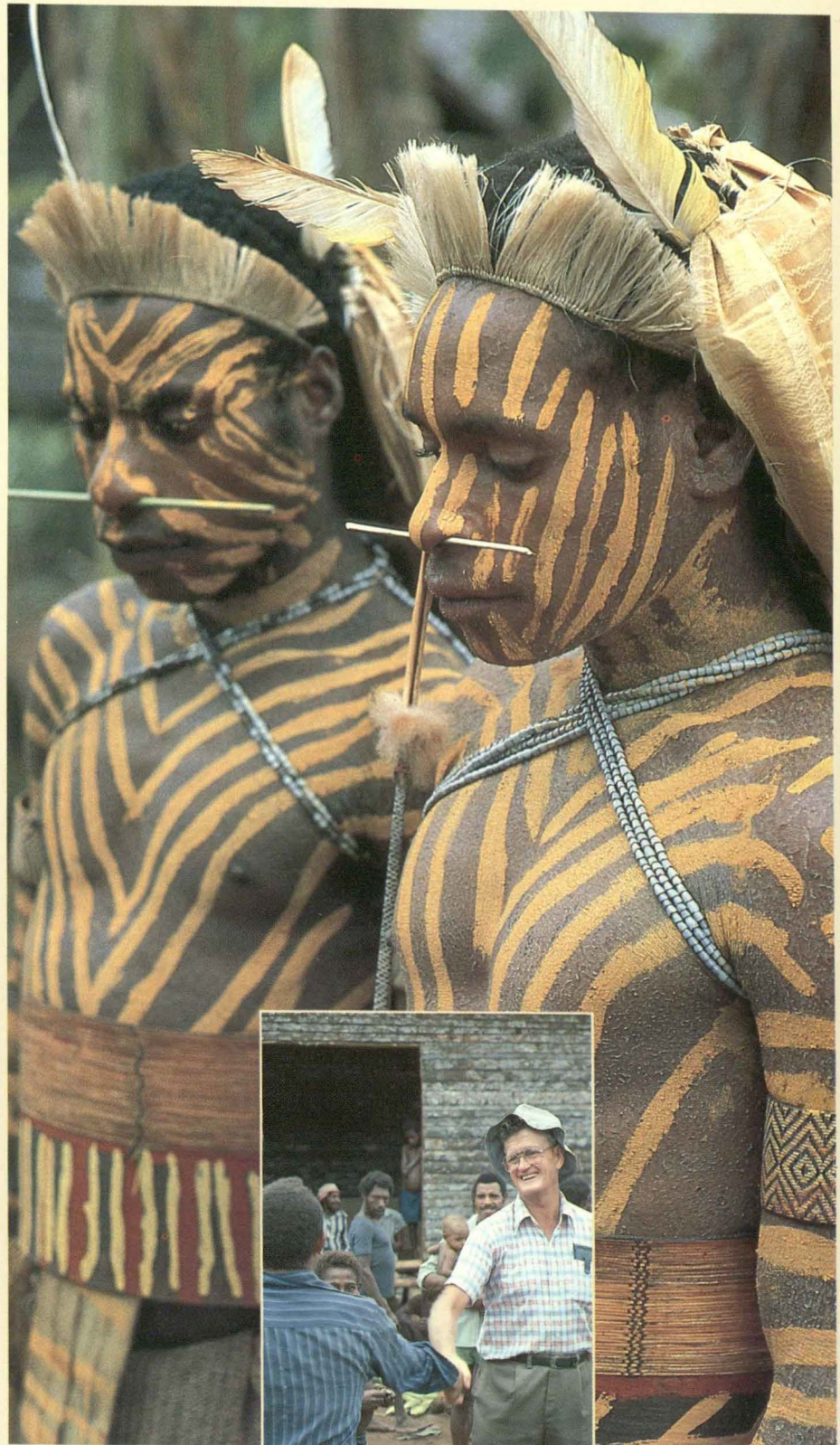
REVISITED

Story and photographs
by David Eastburn

In the late 1960s a film was made about the Biami people who live near Nomad River in the Western Province. It was named 'Tidikawa', in honor of one of the main characters, a young spirit medium who conducted seances to contact ancestor spirits.

The Biami are forest dwellers whose territory occupies part of the Great Papuan Plateau. The film recorded their traditional lifestyle, which at the time was little influenced by Western society or the industrialised world. In the late 1960s the Biami, who were the dominant group in the region, still greatly resented the imposition of Australian administration laws on their lives. Many government laws were totally opposite to traditional Biami values, which created tension and the potential for conflict.

While making the film, the crew came to know the people of Obeimi village quite well and over the years often thought of them. They wondered what various individuals might be doing and how the lifestyle of the Biami people might have changed. From these idle thoughts grew the idea of a second film to show the changes which have occurred in the past 20 years.



Right Biami initiates in traditional stripes of yellow ochre and wearing bark wigs. **inset** Missionary Tom Hoey greets one of his flock at market.

After years of planning, Susan Cornwell, who had assisted with the making of the original 'Tidikawa' film and who was now a film director, returned to the land of the Biami to convert a dream into reality.

During the long flight from Port Moresby, she tried to imagine what she would find. Susan had contacted Tom and Salome Hoey, missionaries who had established a mission station at Mougulu in Biami territory in the early 1970s. Nothing could have prepared her for what she was about to experience.

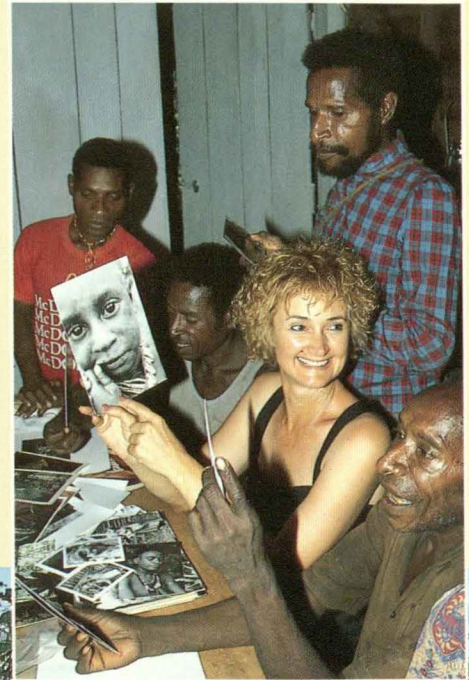
Finally, below, in the heart of Biami territory was Mougulu. This hydro-powered settlement consists of mission buildings, a school, a church community centre, a hospital, a sports field, a trade store, dairy sheds and a sawmill clustered around the airstrip.

A welcoming committee, complete with a sign in colored chalk, gathered around the aircraft. Susan was overwhelmed. She had expected to have to search for the people from Obeimi, not to have them waiting to welcome her.

Following a welcome by Tom Hoey and a short discussion, Susan was reintroduced to Tidikawa. Although 20 years older and dressed in a pair of shorts and a t-shirt, he had changed very little. Others pushed forward to be reintroduced. The people from Obeimi had been told by the Hoeyes that Susan was returning to make another film and they eagerly awaited her arrival.

The new film was given the working title of 'Tidikawa Revisited'. Susan was the director, as well as an actress. Cameraman Steve Mason had worked on many films including 'Mad Max' and 'Gorillas in the Mist'. Soundman Ian

Top Susan shows villager photograph of himself taken 20 years ago. **bottom** Susan's welcoming committee of Biami people.





Top Mougulu's sole land transport vehicle. **centre** Soundman Ian Sherrey and cameraman Steve Mason during a break in filming. **bottom** Tom Hoey talking to Mougulu villagers.

Sherrey had recently worked on a film called 'Passage out of Paradise', about a race between small sailing canoes from Bali, in Indonesia, to Melville Island in Northern Australia.

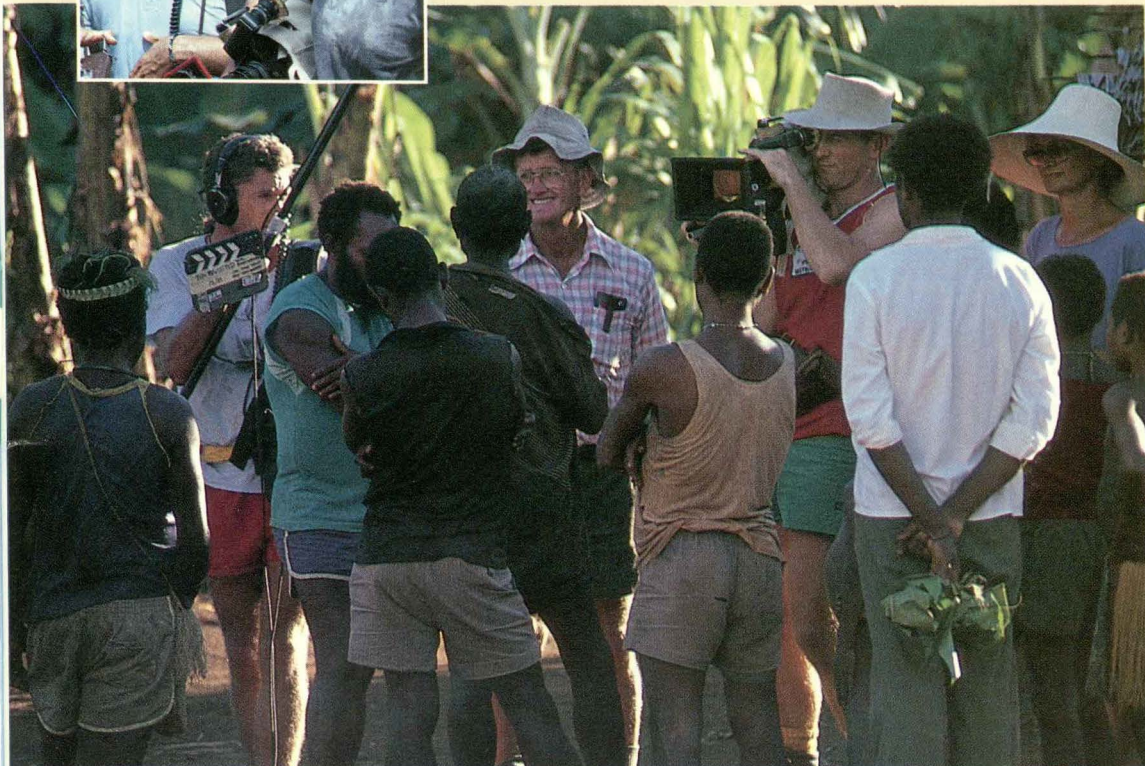
The main characters in 'Tidikawa Revisited' quickly emerged. They were Tidikawa; Haiefi, who had been Tidikawa's seance assistant in the first film; and Tom and Salome Hoey, who had brought Christianity and many other changes to the lives of the Biami.

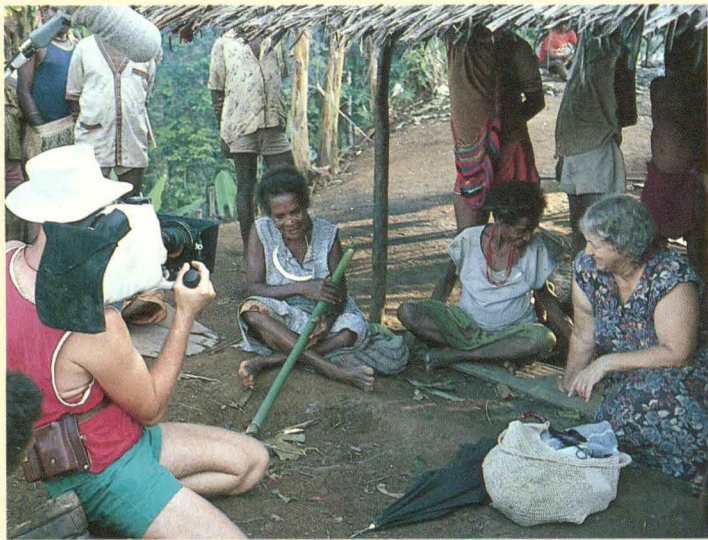
Tidikawa has resisted many of the changes brought by the mission. He still contacts the ancestor spirits and follows many traditional Biami beliefs. Haiefi has become a Christian and is an active member of the mission community.

Susan brought with her a large collection of photographs taken during the making of the first film. These created great interest — the people living around Mougulu never tired of looking at them. Visitors from surrounding areas also often arrived to view these images from the past. More exciting than the photographs were videos of the original Tidikawa film and other footage taken at the same time. Video evenings at the community centre were extremely popular.

As the film progressed, the changes which had taken place in Biami society over the past 20 years became obvious. Biami longhouses are still built on ridges with commanding views over the surrounding countryside, but they no longer serve as fortresses. Gone are the loopholes, slotted at intervals along the walls, which enabled the inhabitants to fire arrows at the enemy. The fighting platforms at the rear of the houses are now recreational meeting places. The paths are no longer booby-trapped with needle-sharp skewers to puncture the feet of would-be attackers. Today, some Biamis, especially Christians, live in individual family houses.

Biami dead are no longer placed on platforms next to the longhouses. This custom was forbidden as a health hazard by the Australian administration. Burial was very difficult for the Biami to accept, as they believed that the ground was inhabited by evil spirits.





Top Salome Hoey talking with Obeimi villagers. **centre** Biami mother and daughter at initiation ceremony. **bottom** Biami warriors were always well armed and prepared to defend themselves.

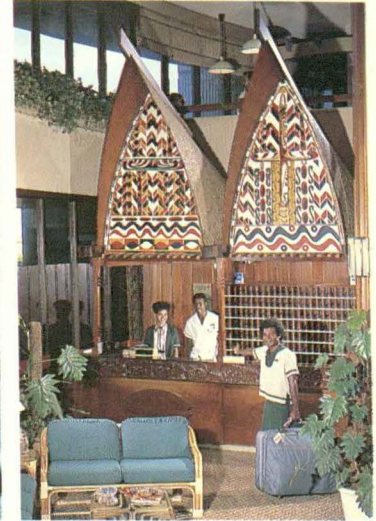
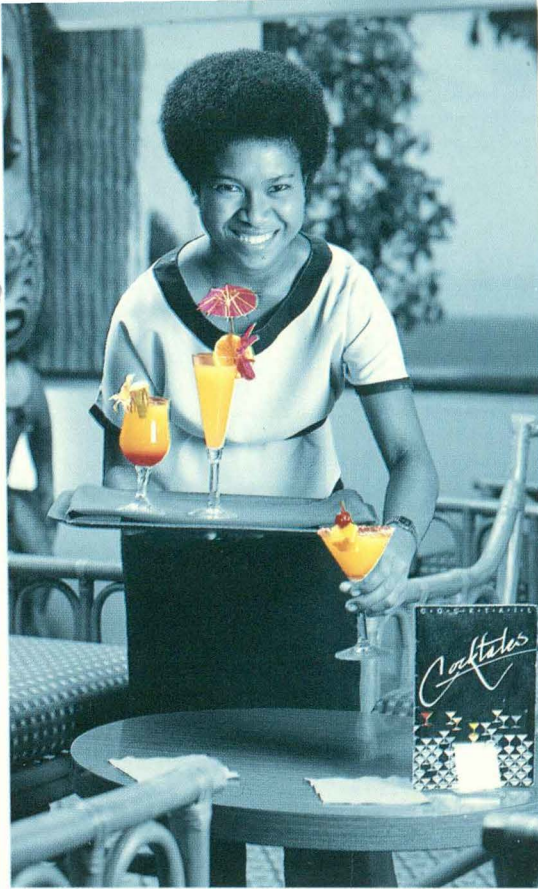
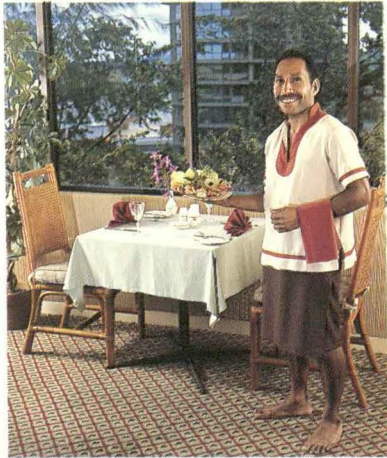
Today, coconut trees are sometimes planted near graves, although tradition prevented the Biami from growing coconuts in the past. They believed that the earth would turn upside down if coconut trees were planted by Biami people.

Songs sung in the long-houses today may be traditional ballads, 'spirit singing', or Christian hymns which have been translated into Biami language. 'Amazing Grace' is a favorite. Traditional initiation ceremonies are still carried out, but today 'initiation' for young people includes going to school.

Probably the most significant change in Biami society has been in the area of communication. People can now travel freely and without fear. Aircraft regularly visit Mougulu. Radios bring the rest of PNG to the Biami. Young Biami people can communicate with people in other parts of the country and overseas. A computer has recently been installed at Mougulu to assist with the recording of the Bible in the Biami language. Peace, Christianity and a cash economy have all brought great changes to Biami society.

The Biami have adopted some Western ideas and products and dropped some traditional customs, but remain proud of their culture. The new film has now been edited and includes segments from the original 'Tidikawa' combined with footage about the Biami people today. The new film has been named 'Tidikawa — At The Edge Of Heaven'. This raises the possibility of a third film — perhaps 'Tidikawa 2010', being produced to record the changes in the lives of the Biami people over the next 20 years.





The obvious choice.

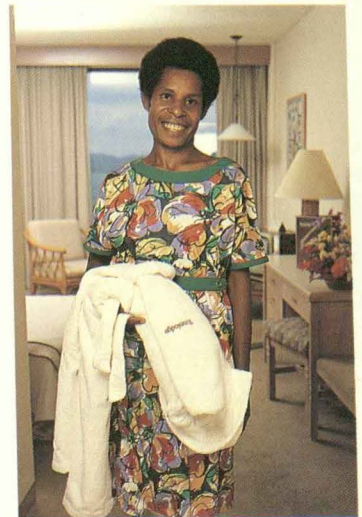
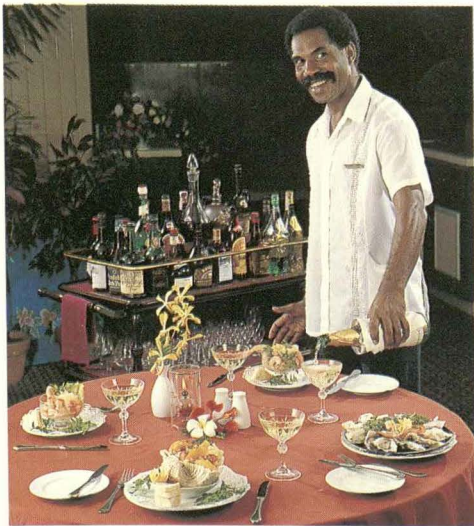
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Vanuatu will fulfill anyone's south sea paradise fantasy and in April or May, offers the opportunity for the cultural experience of a lifetime — the Pentecost Island land dives, one of the world's most breathtaking ritual spectacles.

On Saturdays during these two months, Vanuatu's daredevil Pentecost land divers free fall from a rickety 30-metre, hand-built tower. That's the equivalent of diving headfirst off a 10-storey building.

There is very little known about the historic traditions of the land dive. Among the few things that can be said with some certainty are that the ni-Vanuatu — the name by which Vanuatu people refer to themselves — or Pentecost villagers believe that a rich and bountiful yam harvest is dependent on the annual success of the land diver ceremony. The diver's head brushing the earth at the bottom of the jump is a symbolic soil fertilisation rite. The dive is a test of courage, and in this way boys are recognised as men and men can again prove their right to manhood.

The origins of land diving are lost in the depths of unwritten time, but there is no doubt that the ritual precedes the New Zealand and Australian bungee craze by at least 5,000 years.

The modern death-defying bungee jumper is carefully strapped into a harness which is tethered to an engineered and well-tested elastic lifeline. The land diver plummets headfirst towards a newly-cleared jungle slope with only a carefully selected liana vine tied to each ankle. And, at the bottom of the dive, if the land diver's head does not graze the earth, or if he crashes, the dive is considered somewhat less than successful. The liana vine is selected in April and May because it contains a great deal of moisture which makes it flexible and adds elasticity.

The diving tower is built according to ancient methods.

A tall banyan or palm tree forms a core to which the trunks of smaller trees and saplings are braced with branches and bound together with vines. No modern fasteners, such as nails, screws or wires, are used. The tapering tower which results is then tethered by vines to surrounding trees to increase its stability. Different parts of the tower are named after the human body, starting with the base or feet and ending with the crown or head. Traditionally, each diver constructs his own diving platform, so that no one else is to blame if it collapses. For weeks before his jump, each diver adheres to a strict diet, does not do any gardening and observes various taboos.

Boys as young as seven jump from the lowest nine-metre height, which is the equivalent of a three-storey building. After friends assist, by carefully fastening a vine to each of the diver's ankles, the diver hesitates at the edge of his platform and drops a leaf to the ground. Tradition has it that this will take any bad luck with it, although Western sceptics think it is more likely done to judge wind conditions.

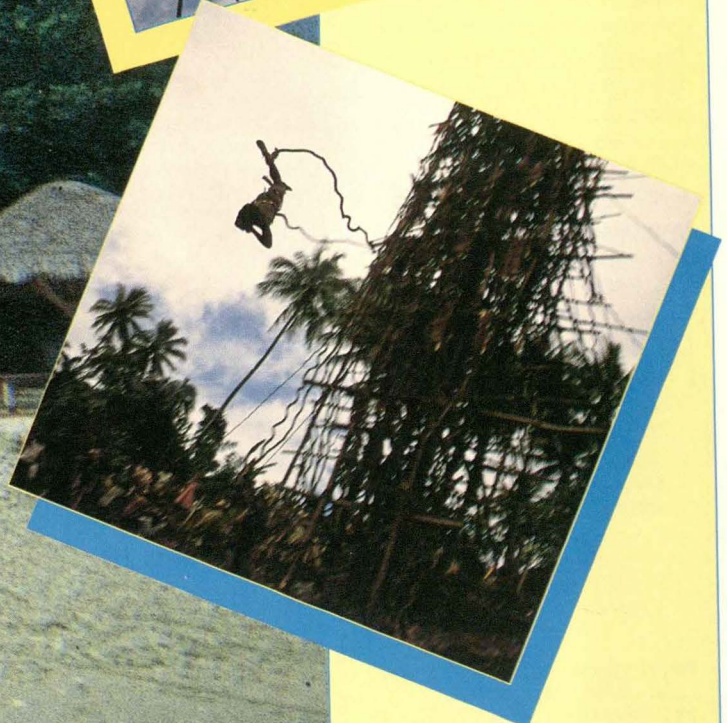
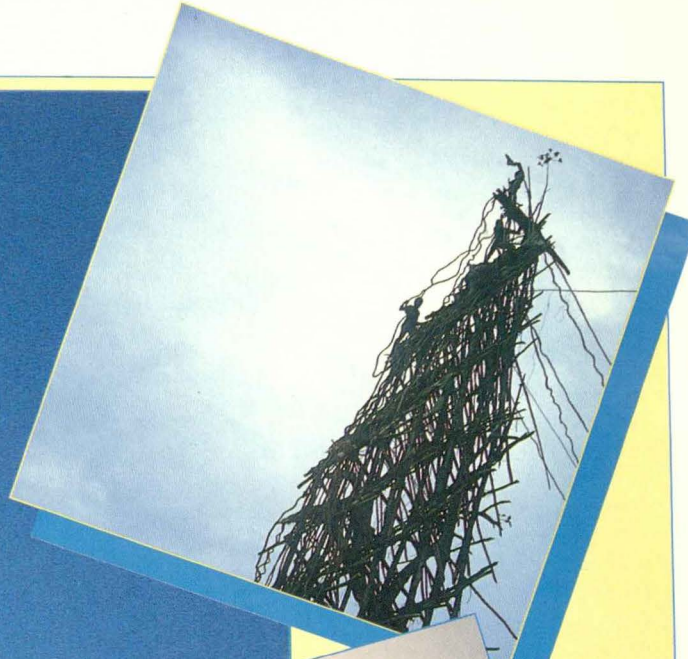
Right *The beach at the Hideaway Resort, Pentecost Island, Vanuatu. insets, from top* *Plunging towards earth from the top platform.*

PENTECOST Land D

Story and photographs by
Warren Lloyd Holtzman and Marion Krutchkoff



Divers

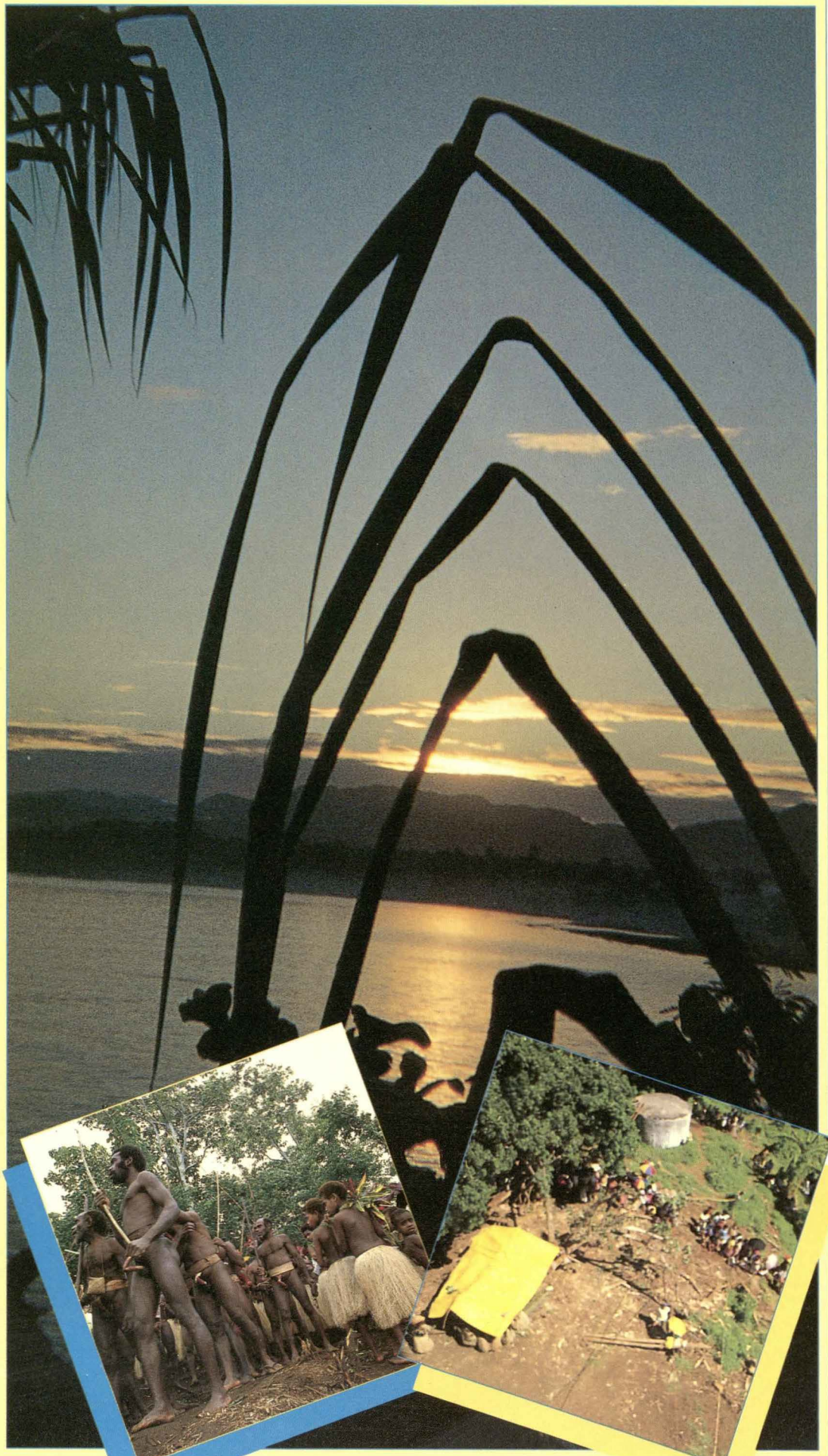


On the flat, near the dive target area, the male villagers chant and stamp the earth with rhythmic dancing. This continues all day and seems to instill courage in the divers. If a diver wishes to speak, he raises his hand and the crowd becomes silent. At this point he usually shares some personal or family problem which has been bothering him. When he has spoken, the chanting, singing and whistling begin again and build to a crescendo.

Starting with the youngest boy at the lowest height, the other divers follow. Finally, only one diver remains at the crown of the tower. He claps his hands, shouts and leans backwards slowly, his trim body forming an elegant arch. In what seems to the observer like slow motion, he falls out and forward. His knees are slightly bent and he crosses his arms on his chest. His body is still in a graceful arch — not dissimilar to the body positions of sky-divers, except for the folded arms — as he plummets earthwards. Then the vines snap taut, the tower trembles, his head brushes the earth and he recoils towards the base of the tower.

His male friends and family members rush forward, grabbing, screaming, whooping, grasping, supporting and mobbing him. The women are on the sidelines, loudly whistling encouragement and appreciation. The vines are cut from the last diver's ankles. The yam harvest has been assured for another year and the ceremony is over.

Air Niugini operates a weekly service between Port Moresby and Port Vila, Vanuatu, via Honiara.



Right Vanuatu sunset. **inset, left** Land diving ritual calls for traditional dress. **inset, right** View from the top of the dive tower.

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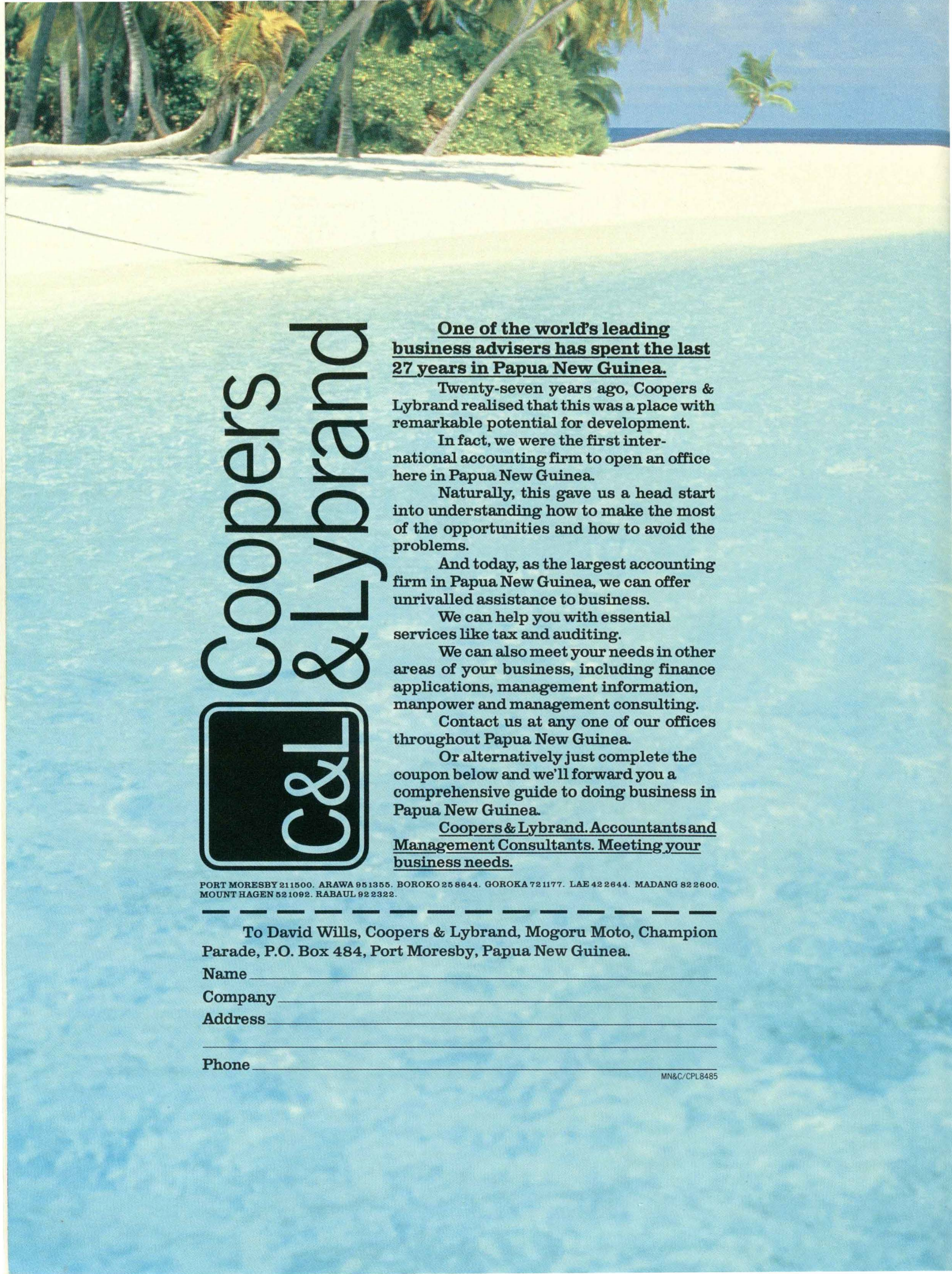
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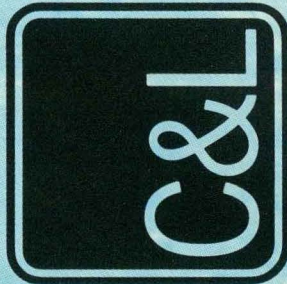
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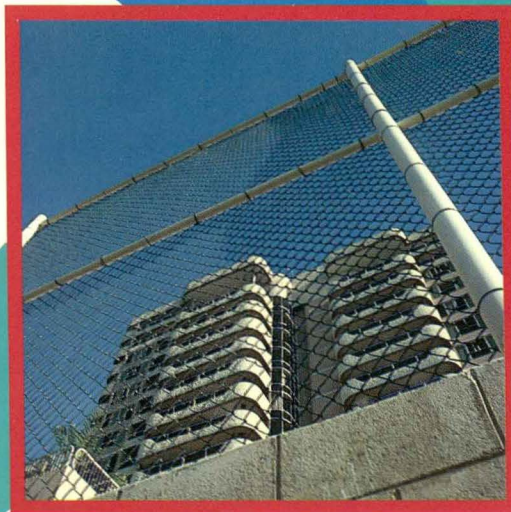
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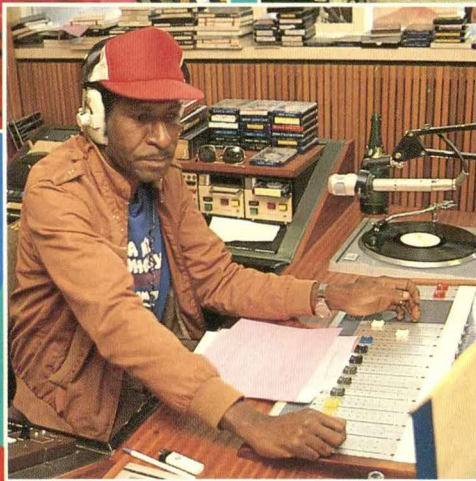
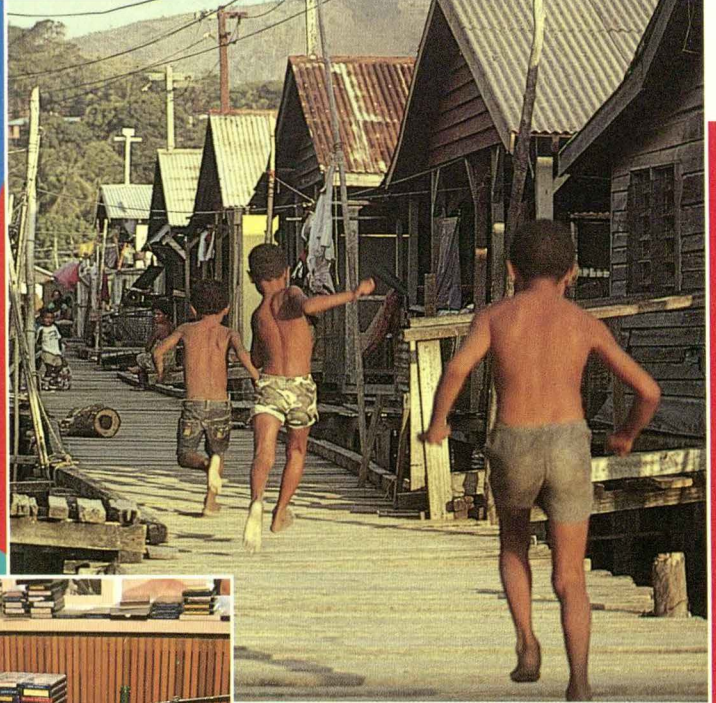
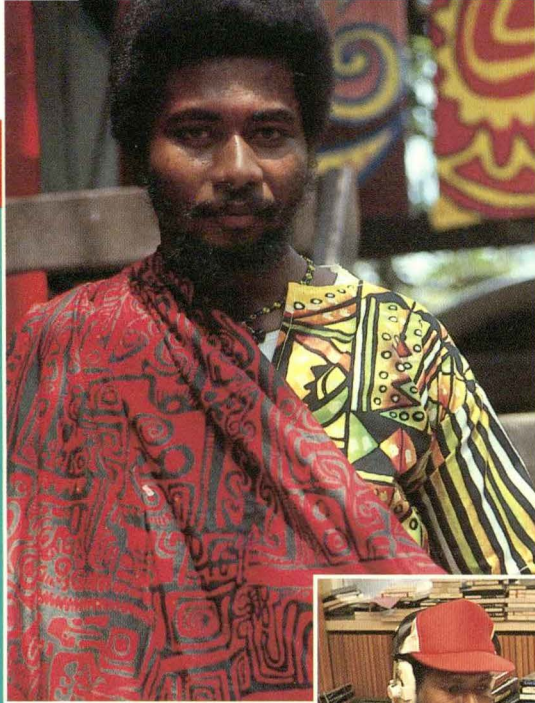
20th

CENTURY



Story and photographs by Liz Thompson

Above *Ela Beach Towers, new
apartment buildings in
Port Moresby.*

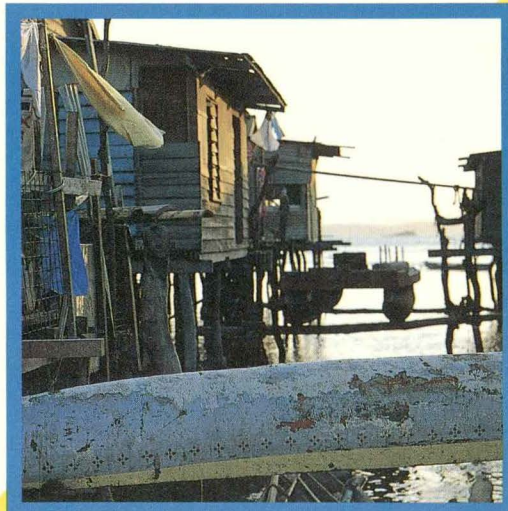


Top left National Arts School student with fabric he designed for textile industry. **top right** 'Main Street', Hanuabada stilt village, Port Moresby. **centre** Gilton Mau, National Radio announcer. **bottom** Hanuabada village.

“**A**nd now we have those mellow boys, the Beach Boys and that famous tune, ‘California Girls’ to start off one hour of non-stop music.” It’s the voice of Gilton Mau, one of the announcers for Papua New Guinea’s national radio station in the capital district of PNG, Port Moresby. Just one of the 21 broadcasting stations located throughout the country, National Radio is reputed, statistically at least, to reach the entire population.

The voice drifts from open windows of cars waiting at the city’s Taurama lights. To the right, people wander into the Boroko squash court complex and on the corner, the windows of a Mazda garage are crammed with spare parts.

PNG, best known for its mud men, painted faces and rugged terrain, is a country

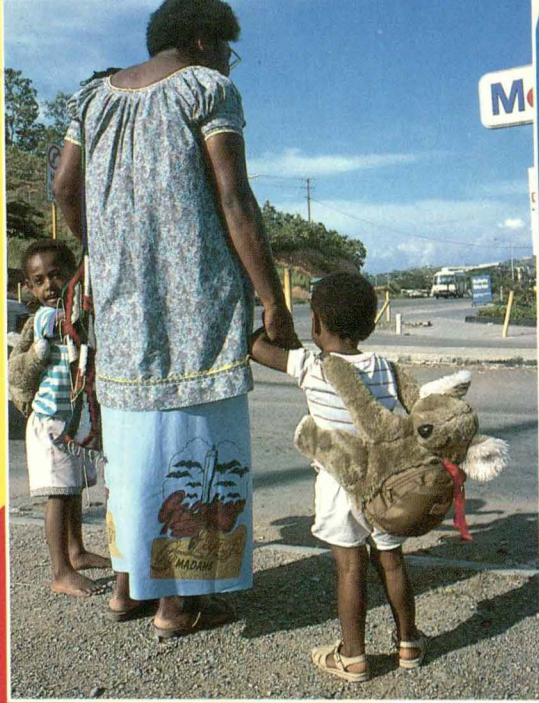
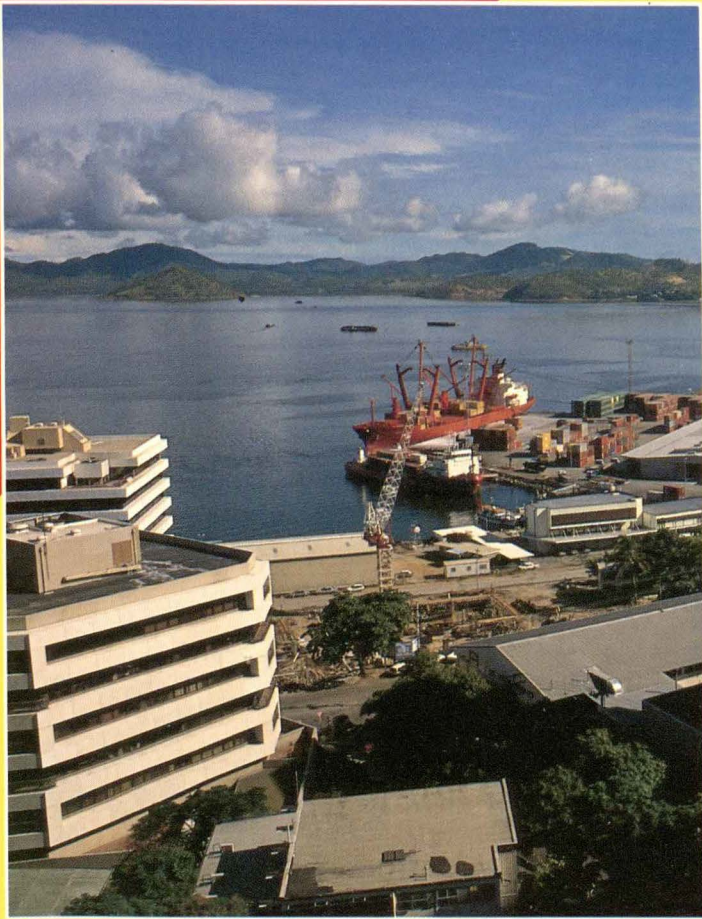


which is celebrating its heritage while carving a place for itself in a 20th Century world.

PNG is in the process of accommodating technology, developing a Western political and judicial system and fostering international relations. In less than a century, the country’s capacity for adjustment — as in so many other developing nations — is quite remarkable. While implementing change, it struggles to incorporate tradition by maintaining pride in continuing links with the past.

Radio broadcasting is only one element of an increasing communications media network. Em TV, the country’s national television station, employs local reporters, editors, camera operators, sound engineers and graphic designers.

National newspapers

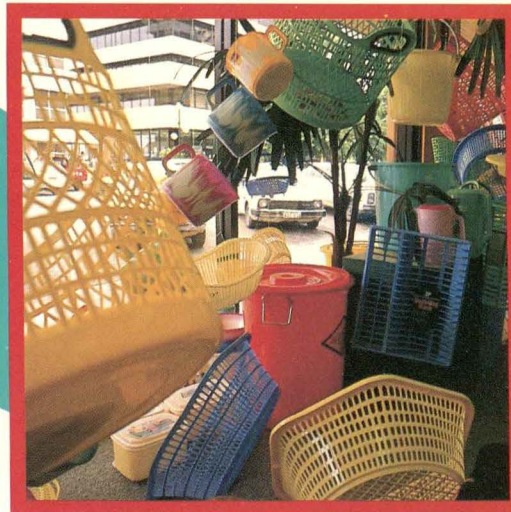


Top left Part of Port Moresby's central business district and port. **top right** Koala backpacks from Australia. **bottom** Downtown store window display.

recruit journalists who have graduated from the National University of PNG. Located on Waigani Drive, the university is a sign of great cultural change although the appearance of some graduating students reinforces the fact that degrees aren't gained at the cost of cultural pride.

At last year's graduation ceremony the chancellor's hand was shaken by some students in Western gowns and mortar boards, while others were dressed in traditional costume. Covered in pig fat and bright yellow ochres, wearing pigs' tusks and cassowary spines, a wig man received a BA in psychology.

So much of the country's real charm is the constant juxtaposition of the old and the new; tradition and development. This is particularly evident in Port Moresby. The Travelodge



Hotel, with nine floors and 177 rooms overlooking the city, is decorated with traditional Sepik posts and spirit chairs adorn the reception area.

A constantly changing skyline reveals the frequency of new building developments. 'Steamships', one of the largest local supermarkets, attracts Highlanders — distinctive in their small knitted hats — watching people travelling up and down on escalators.

Shelves are lined with transistor radios, video cassette recorders and stereo systems and Office 2000 advertises the latest in office equipment. A photographic mini-lab churns out color pictures. Watches, pots and pans, records and cassettes line the counters. Outside women sit cross-legged on the ground selling betelnut and men wander hand-in-hand in the streets.



FUEL FOR THOUGHT

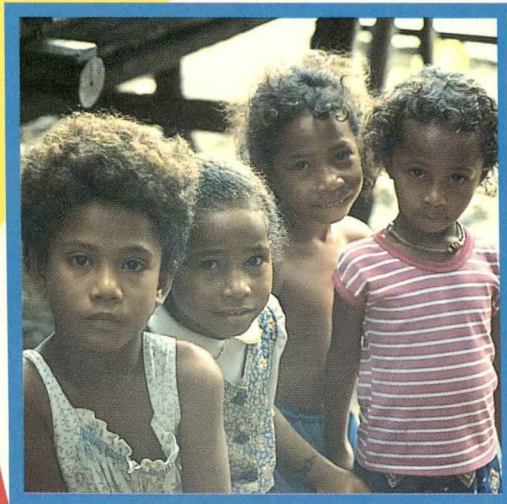
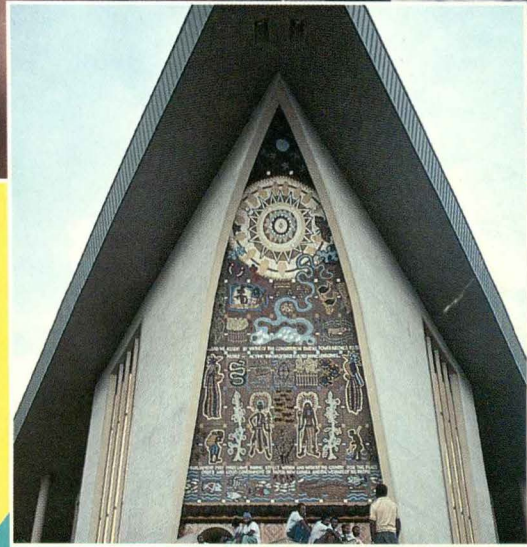
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Top Young residents of Two Mile settlement, Port Moresby. **centre** Parliament House entrance. **bottom** Pari village children.



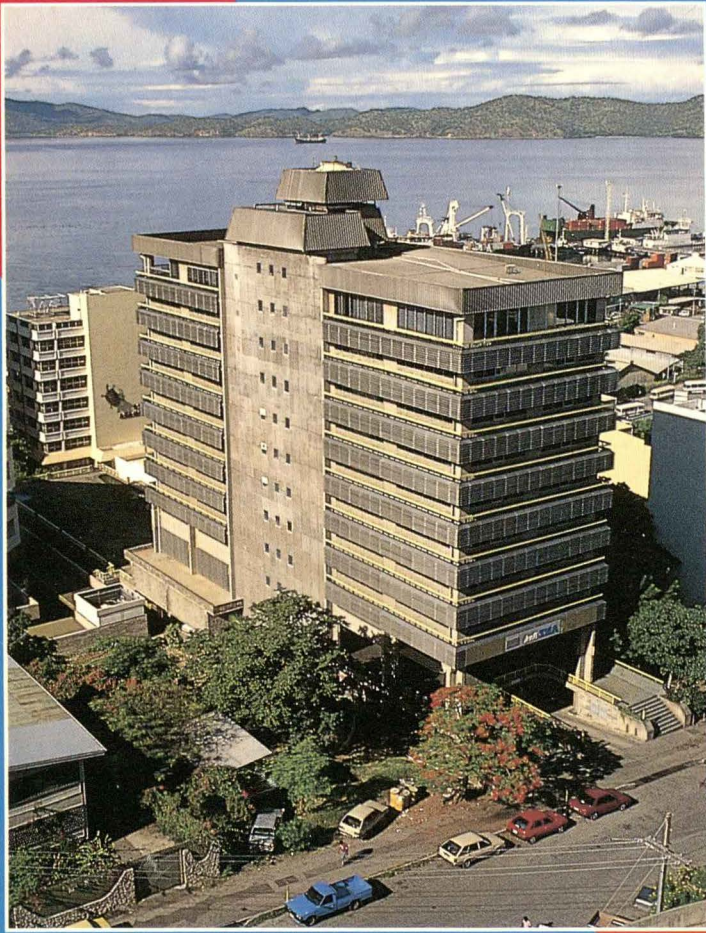
A recently opened Japanese restaurant is located close to Koki markets. Inside, Japanese chefs throw their chopping knives deftly in the air as they prepare food on enormous hot-plates built into the centres of tables. The guests watch as they cook lobsters and crayfish, which are served with bowls of sauces and dips and followed by pots of Japanese tea.

Around the corner at the market, heavily tattooed local women are seated, selling pyramids of pink jamalacs and deep purple aubergines. Piles of spinach and watercress are constantly sprayed with water to freshen them in the scorching heat. Oysters strung onto thin vines make circular seafood necklaces and smoked wallabies, charred over a fire, are stacked on concrete benches.

Pineapple Building, built in the shape of an enormous pineapple, has slanted windows reminiscent of the fruit's skin. Nearby, Koki and Hanuabada stilt villages line the coastline and settlement houses are built on rocks and around trees.

Ela beach is changing as the government builds a promenade and plants young trees along its edge. Women still wallow in the sea with billowing skirts, searching for mudcrabs and mussels as the tide goes out. Small children swim, unaware or unconcerned that they are fully dressed.

PNG is a country in transition, where there has been few of the advantages of a slow evolution. The film 'First Contact' showed the Leahy brothers landing in the Highlands, to be greeted by nationals who believed the

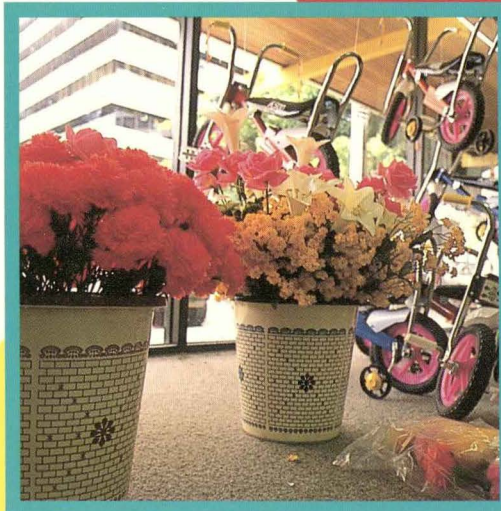


Far left Port Moresby from the top of the Travelodge Hotel. **above** Public counter at photographic mini-lab. **below** Flowers on sale in city shop.

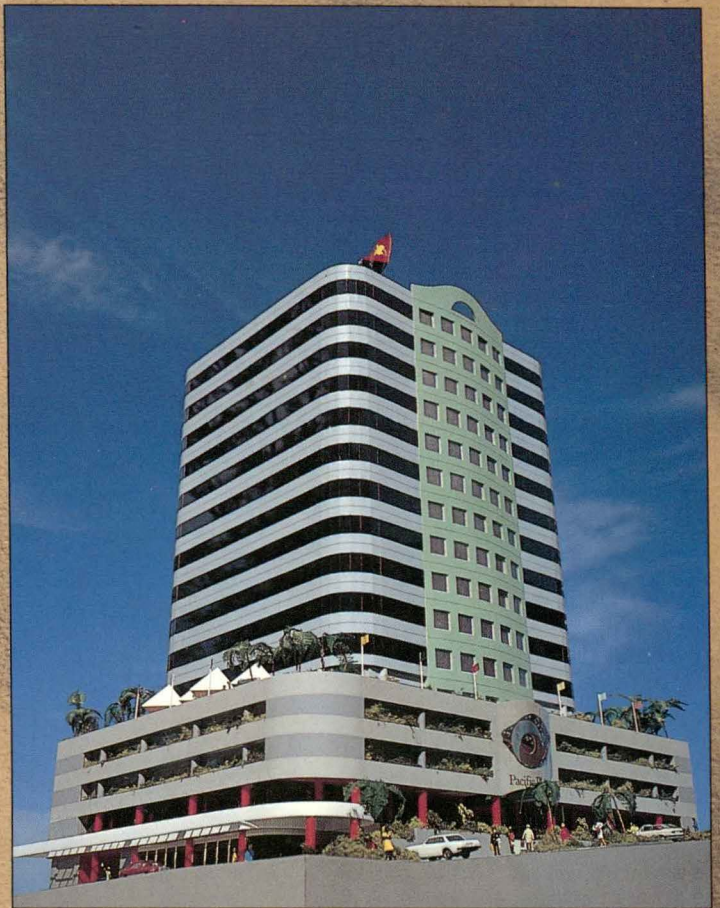
mountains of their valley were the perimeter of the world. Villagers, thinking the plane was a huge bird, tried to feed it and discover its sex.

Only a few decades later the country has coped with inconceivable changes. Port Moresby, often thought of as a place of dry, dusty streets and little interest, exemplifies the changes taking place in PNG.

Hand-in-hand with singsings and ceremonies which celebrate the traditional elements of its culture, are the growing numbers of contemporary writers and artists. Not only individuals, but educational institutions and industry reflect PNG's courage and pride in the face of a new world.



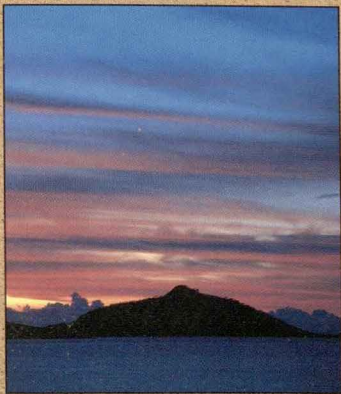
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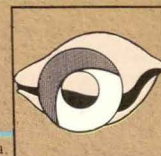


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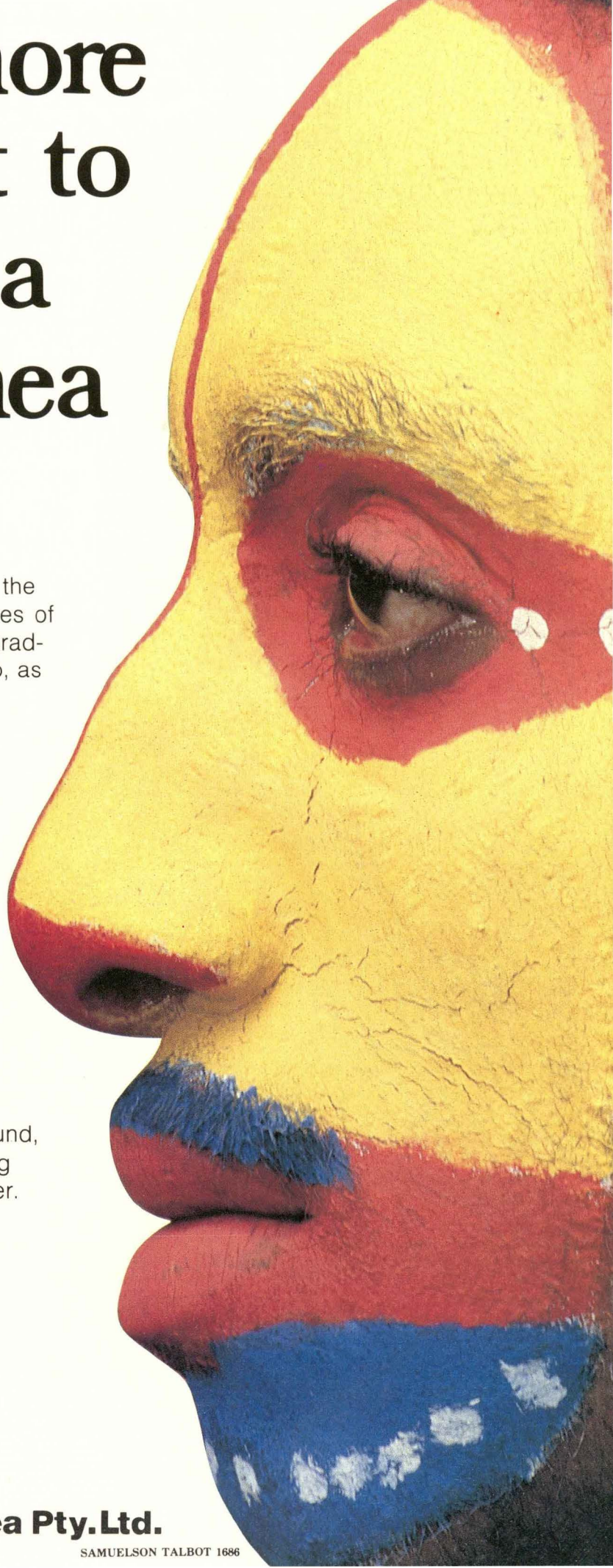
We sell explosives to break new ground, and adhesives, sealants and concreting products needed to hold things together.

All in all, there's a lot more holding ICI DULUX together than just paint. Rather like Papua New Guinea.



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SAMUELSON TALBOT 1686



Sepik River



Story and photographs
by Liz Thompson

CARVINGS

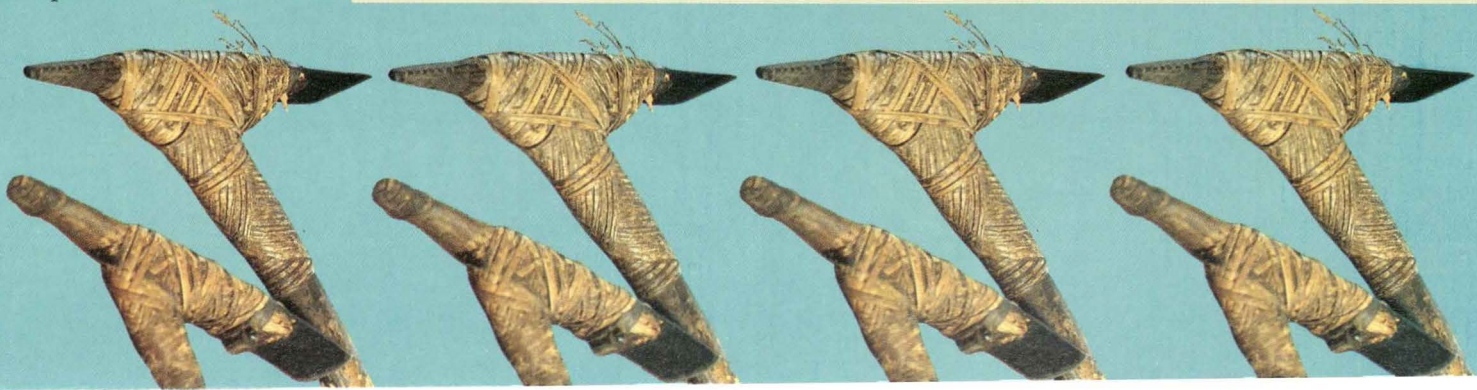
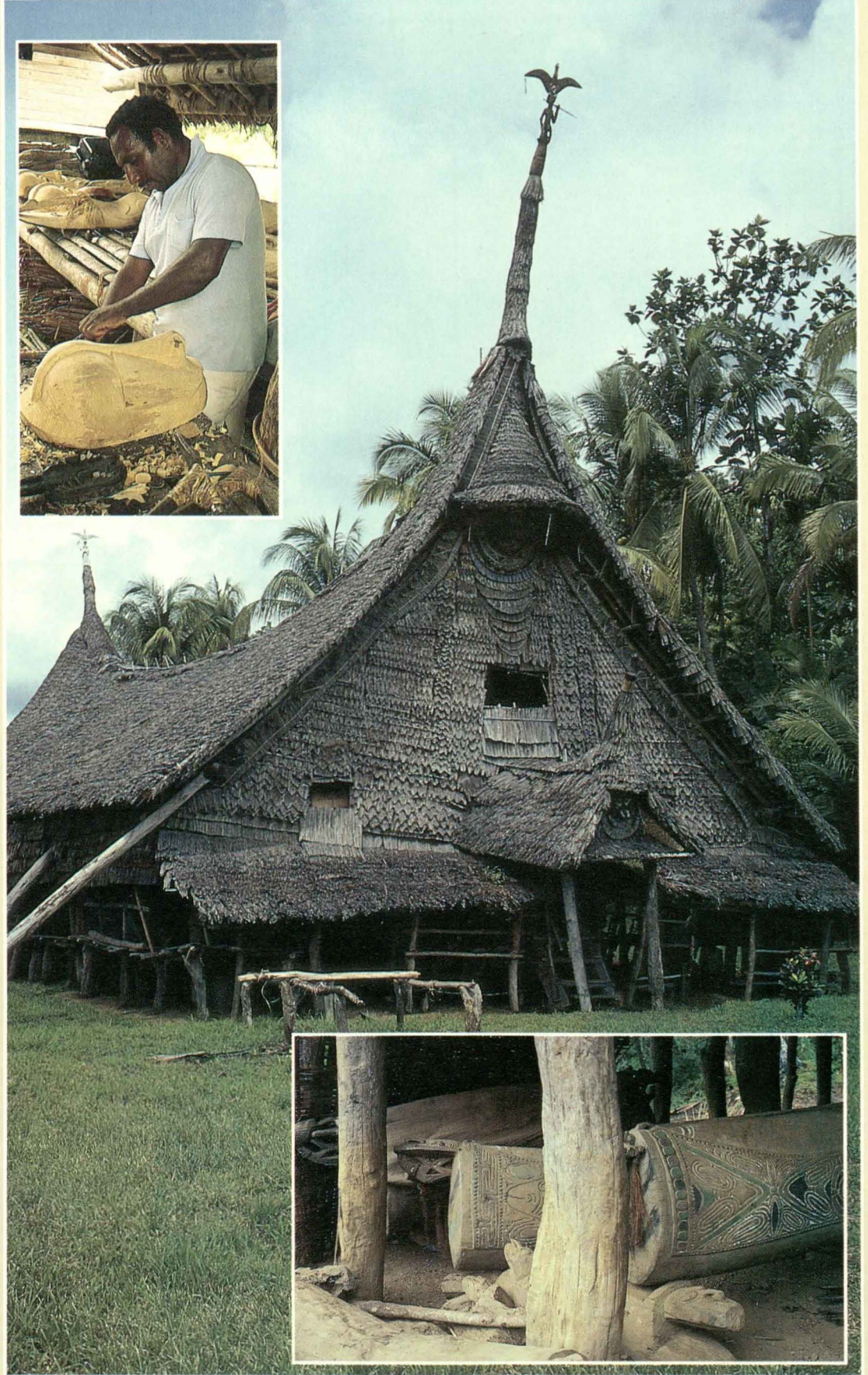
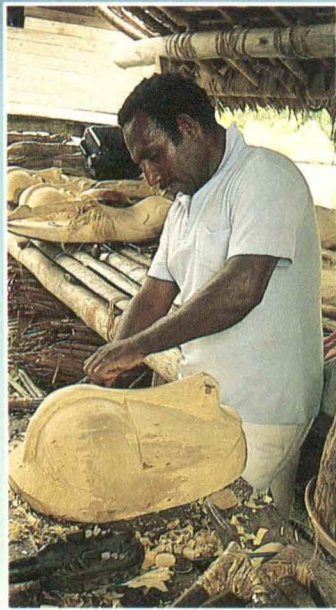
The ancestral wooden carvings of the Sepik River are world famous. Pieces can be found in most major museums and art galleries where they are exhibited as fine examples of tribal art. These carvings have an elusive quality which appeals to people of different cultures. All over the world, the pieces hold a particular charm for those who have no knowledge of their background or original meaning.

The carvings were originally created as part of the animistic way of life practised by the Sepik people. Animism or 'attribution of living soul to inanimate objects' and ancestor worship were chief forms of religious expression before Western missionary contact.

In ancestor worship the individual's or clan's forefathers are immortalised in stories and myths. Ancestors' deeds and exploits are passed down by word-of-mouth across generations who pay homage to them. Spirits of the ancestors are still believed to be present and exercise great power in determining such things as sickness, fertility, productivity of a garden and luck in war. Villagers carve figures in memory of their ancestors, depicting each ancestral spirit's particular image and style. This is to reassure the ancestral spirit that it has not been forgotten and to encourage it to help and protect the carver.

The ancestral figurines have great power. Often kept in the men's 'haus tambaran', they are given offerings of food and betelnut and, as sacred objects, are held in great respect by the villagers.

Sepik masks, as seen in



Title page *Tambanum Village carving.*

Facing page *Kabriman Village spirit house. inset, top Mask carver at work. inset, bottom Garamut drums.*

This page, top *Partly completed Tambanum Village mask.*
inset *Stoking a fire to singe carvings. bottom* *Sissano Lagoon, West Sepik.*

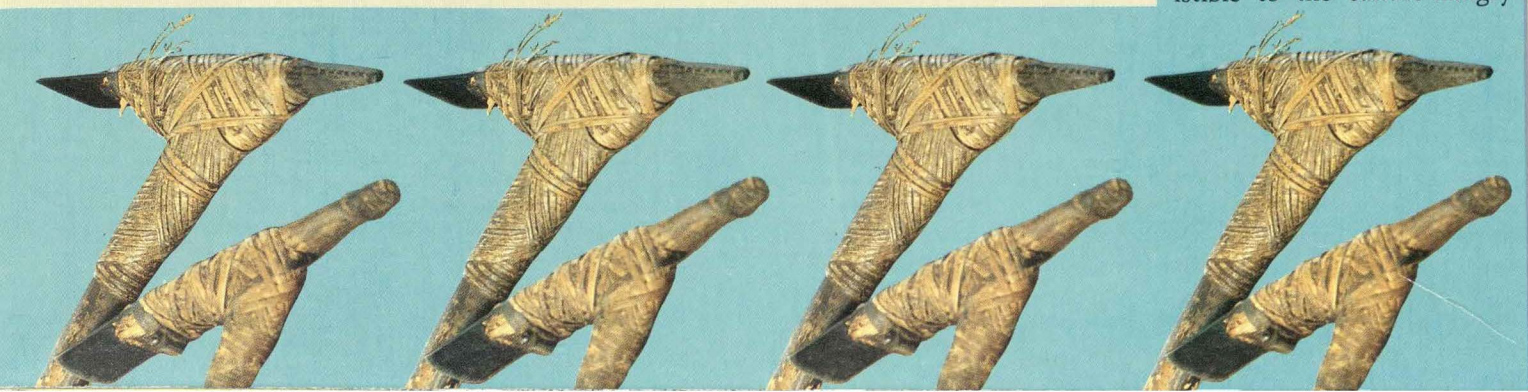
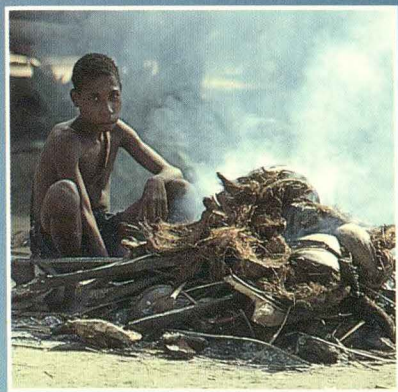


many of the world's art galleries, were made for specific ceremonies. Minai masks for example, are usually made as a set of four, including the older brother, older sister, younger brother and younger sister. They are strapped on to large rattan costumes during initiation ceremonies and the wearer takes on the persona of the ancestor. For the skin-cutting ceremony a sacred flute is played and the spiritual presence of the ancestors strengthens the act of initiation regarding manhood and the tribe.

Sabi masks have another purpose. Originally fixed to the centre of a V-shaped bark shield, they were placed in the bow of war canoes during times of conflict. As large canoes full of tribesmen engaged in combat moved across the water and horns were blown, the Sabi mask was the focus of the enemy's gaze. Hung on the front of the canoe, its function was to strike fear and apprehension into the enemy.

Of the many different types of carvings these examples provide only a rough idea of the diversity of pieces produced. Today a wide range of carvings is still made and much of the inspiration to produce them lies in commercial rather than spiritual motivation.

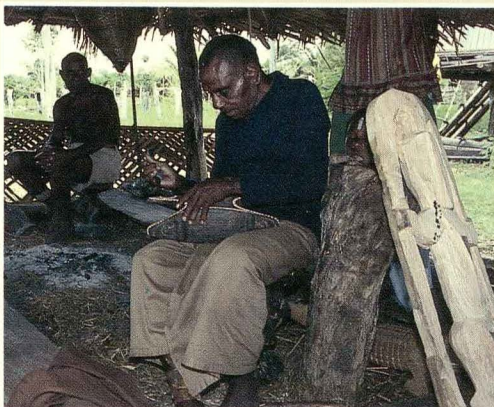
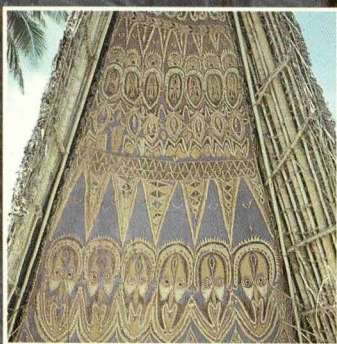
Since the first Germans sailed up the Sepik nearly 100 years ago, the world has been fascinated by the carvings and craftsmen of the river. Collecting expeditions have visited the Sepik regularly since those days and a vast number of pieces has been scattered around the globe. Something about the wooden figures and ochred faces still proves irresistible to the culture-hungry



people of America and Europe. In response to this demand the carvers of the Sepik continue to produce many beautiful pieces.

Using woods such as quila, garamut, cedar and milkwood, the men of the villages Tanbanum, Mindimbit, Yentsuamangua, Koroko, Chambri Lakes and Japanaut busily work with adze and knife. Firstly, they hack out the rough shape of the pieces with an adze. Then the fine work and finishing are completed with the help of a knife made from a heavily ground down bastard file.

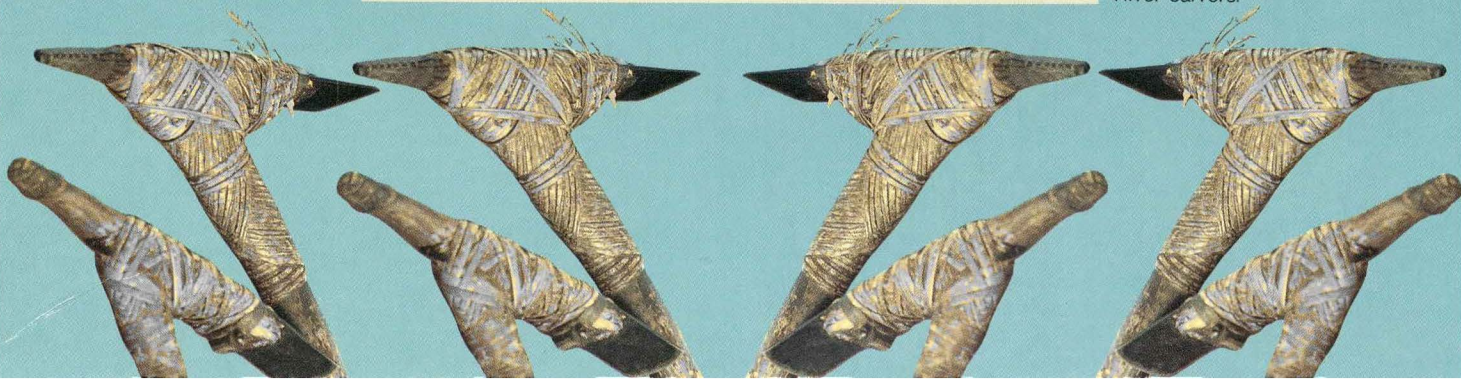
Once carved, the piece is 'cooked', or singed black over the fire. This seals the wood and creates a surface texture over which polychrome ochres can be painted. A lined, symmetrical face is painted on with clear representation of tribal patterns and clan markings. Shells are added for eyes and decoration. Final touches include cassowary feathers, shell inlaid putty, feathers, flowers, string tassels, and sometimes a woven cane surround.



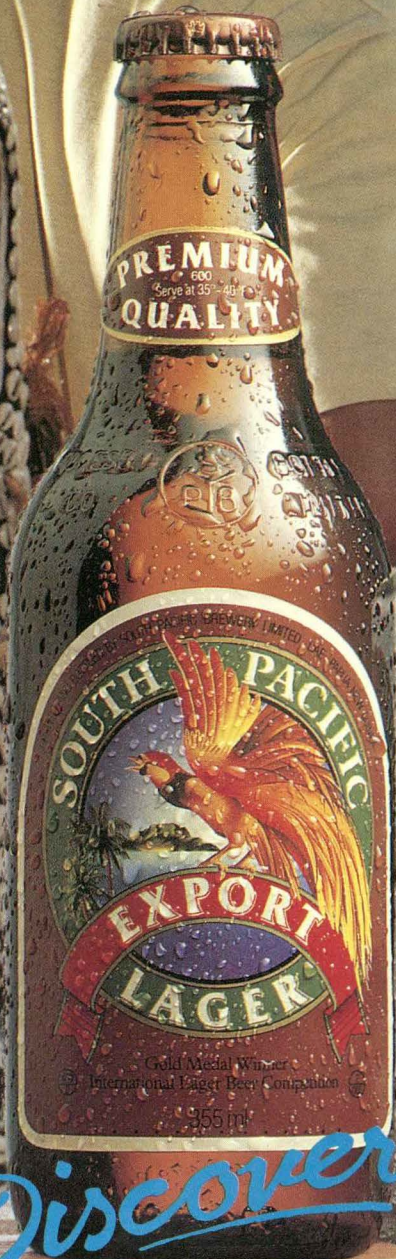
The pieces produced are quite different from the sacred pieces of yesteryear. They are generally a lot brighter, are colored with ground ochres, and have more complicated 'bilas' or decorations — unlike the 'old' pieces that are not colored and are carved only in hardwood.

These contemporary pieces are made with a different objective in mind — to turn the head of an admirer of tribal art rather than to impress an ancestor. However, villagers still show the skill of many generations of fine woodworking experience. Their ability to create expressive pieces out of ochre and wood is still acknowledged worldwide. The fact that these pieces are now displayed more in art galleries and less in museums suggests that there is still great appreciation and fascination for this art form.

Inset, top Maprik Village spirit house decoration. **centre** Ceremonial mask serving as a lamp shade. **bottom** Blackwater River carvers.



SOUTH PACIFIC EXPORT LAGER



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Spirit

Story by Ross Waby
Photographs by Jean-Paul
Ferrero/ Auscape

OF THE SEPIA



The Sepik Spirit glides majestically up the Blackwater River.

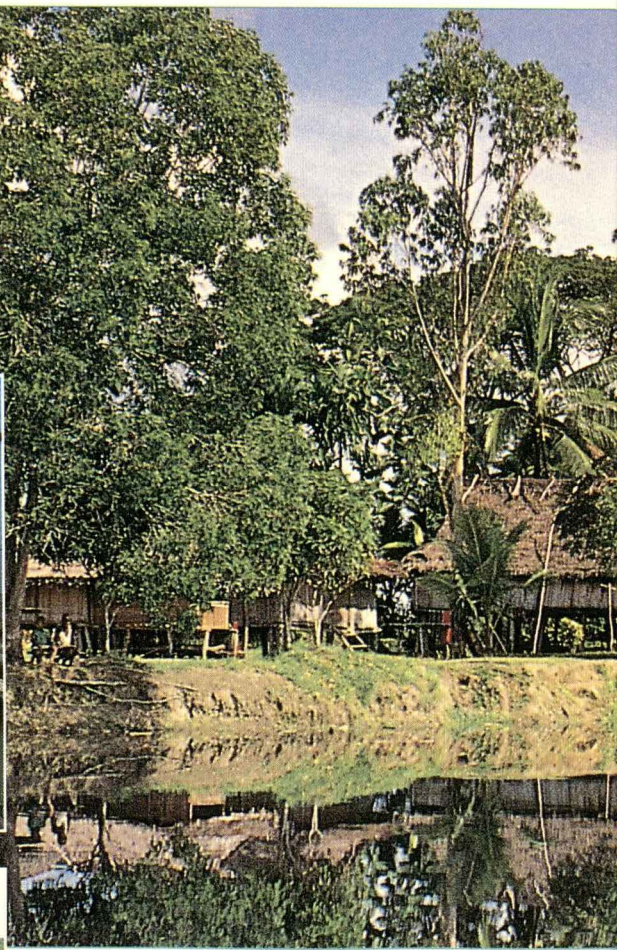


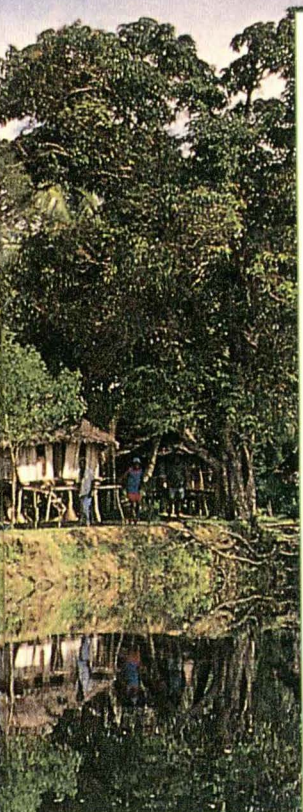
To sail on the Sepik Spirit is to come close to knowing what it must be like to travel through time. Enclosed in spacious, air-conditioned luxury, passengers journey into the past. The Sepik Spirit is a gleaming white ship which incorporates all the comforts and technology of the late 20th Century. Its voyages take it to some of the most remote outposts of human habitation in the world, little changed in millennia. In the waterways and tributaries of the vast lowland river system for which it is named, it moves like a floating palace — serene and surreal.

Our trip, just a few weeks after the ship was commissioned, took us from Timbunke on the Sepik River, up the Blackwater River and the permanently inundated floodplains and lakes through which it meanders. This is the country of the Sepik tribes, renowned for the artistry and spiritual quality of their carving and who, for the most part, live as they always have. "They are hunter-gatherers who have never had much need to domesticate either plants or animals," said the ship's captain, John Bates. The land and the waters are bountiful, yielding a rich and varied diet. The only wild animals they have domesticated are hunting dogs and the occasional cassowary or parrot. The villagers also use considerable skills in managing wild food plants, especially the sago tree, whose starchy pith is the staple food.

Close to the equator, permanently hot and humid, the Sepik River basin is lushly fertile. The comparatively little effort needed to sustain the population leaves plenty of time for cultural pursuits. This may help explain why the Sepik wood carvers have developed such skills. But it goes little way towards explaining the extraordinary artistry that makes their work so coveted in the Western world. The first call on their work is for use in sacred

Top idyllic village setting on Blackwater River. **Inset** Fish are a plentiful staple food. **below** Dugout canoes on the many waterways of the region. **Inset** Sepik Spirit passengers with carvings bought from villagers.





rituals. The surplus is available for sale.

To see and touch this unique corner of the world is reason enough for outsiders to venture up the mighty river and along its many twisting branches. "The Sepik is one of the world's great navigable rivers with a water flow that puts it, I believe, in the top 10," said Captain Bates. "At Timbunke, where you boarded, the river is only 150 metres wide, but the bed is more than 20 metres below the surface and the current is a steady four knots. It drains a vast area of the Papua New Guinea Highlands which, with the lowlands, are regularly deluged with tropical rainstorms. There is a wet season and a wetter season."

While the Sepik and several of its tributaries are navigable by ocean-going craft, the more interesting and remote villages are on streams and lakes far out of reach of conventional vessels. The great stretches of water are so covered with floating islands of grass that from the air they resemble flat, firm land. Only canoes and flat-bottomed river trucks, powered by outboard motors, paddles or poles, can venture far into the lakes areas. That is, with the exception of the Sepik Spirit.

Believed to be the largest ship ever built in PNG, it has an all-steel hull and superstructure, is 30 metres long, 10 metres wide and displaces 260 tonnes. "There is no slipway at Lae where we built it," said Captain Bates. "We launched it in the morning darkness at full tide, using a bulldozer and a tug."

The first of the three decks comprises a big lounge with a bar off to the side, the galley and the dining room. Above it are the guest

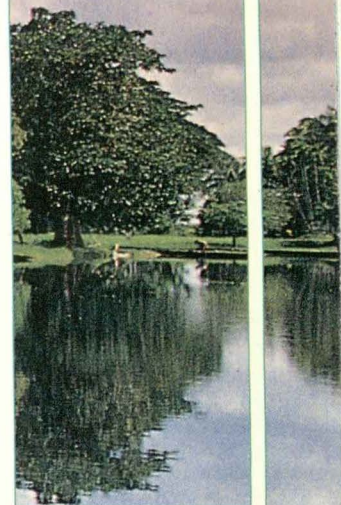
quarters, two double and eight twin suites, each more like hotel rooms than shipboard cabins. The top deck has quarters for the crew of nine and an open-air observation deck. Inside, all is rich wall panelling, beautifully carved wooden statues, comfortable furniture and rich carpeting.

The immaculate interior is maintained with the help of the ship's rules which are impressed upon passengers by the captain. Rule One is: "No shoes inside", which is conveyed to new arrivals as they step aboard. Barefoot informality quickly becomes the norm.

Fully laden, the Sepik Spirit is a self-contained capsule carrying every necessity and luxury for its voyages. Rainwater keeps the tanks topped up and can be augmented by a purification plant. Generators maintain the lighting, air conditioning, refrigeration, music system, video player and internal telephones. The galley turns out fine food and the on-board cellar carries fine wines.

Two 250-horsepower American Caterpillar diesel motors power huge Hamilton jet propulsion units from New Zealand. No propellers means no blades to be jammed by weeds. No propellers and the unique construction of the ship means also that fully laden it draws less than a metre of water. Almost like the spaceship Enterprise of television's 'Star Trek', the Sepik Spirit can go where none like it has gone before.

It penetrates a world of wonder. This is the land of the spirit houses, the haus tambarans, which dominate each village. Like most buildings they sit on high piles which protect them from floods. But they tower above the everyday



houses, with their soaring, elaborately decorated gables and elaborately carved posts. Haus tambarans remain the centre of village cultural life. Young men often remain cloistered in them for months in preparation for initiation ceremonies. Even in their isolation, however, they readily accept visitors so long as no taboos are broken. Similarly, singsings and even funeral ceremonies can be joined by visitors from the Sepik Spirit.

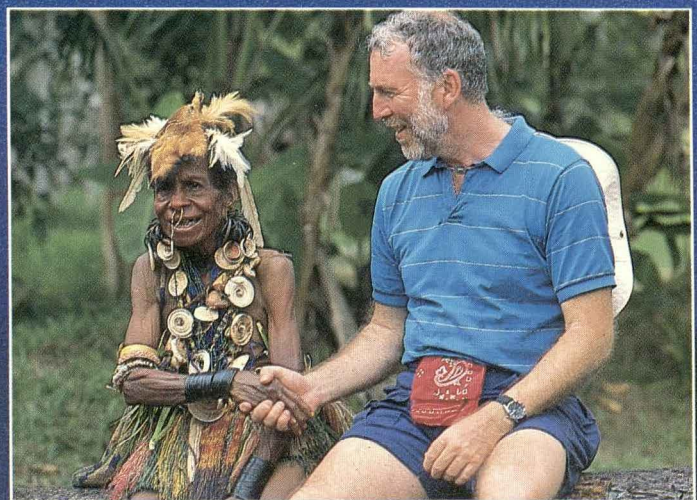
Many of the haus tambarans have 'blood stones' in front, a legacy of more bloodthirsty times. Warriors ceremonially killed captives at the stones. Although the people of the Blackwater area continue to live according to tradition they long ago abandoned head hunting and traditional tribal warfare. Their observance of traditional culture is now mostly confined to wood carving, body decoration, music and singsings. The most affecting and unusual performance on our trip was given by the male flute players and female dancers of Mongavi village on the Karawari River. The haunting sound of the flutes and human voices issuing from the villagers as they danced back and forth on the singsing platform in the haus tambaran was like nothing any of us had heard before.

We travelled to the villages and back by river truck, leaving the 'mother ship' to spend time each day delving into the past. The contrasts between life on board and life on the banks of the river were huge, adding to the effect of time travel. But the people of the villages bridged that gulf with a friendliness and exuberant hospitality that dissolved the differences. The names of the villages roll off the tongue: Guvanamas, Mumeri, Krambit, Sangriman, Kaningra and Mongavi — places perhaps never to be seen again but never to be forgotten.

The Sepik Spirit is owned and operated by Trans Niugini Tours which also owns and operates the world famous lodges Karawari and Ambua. Address: PO Box 371, Mt Hagen, PNG. Telephone: 52 1438, Mt Hagen.



Top Sepik Spirit at dusk. inset Passenger greeted by Amongavi Village lady.





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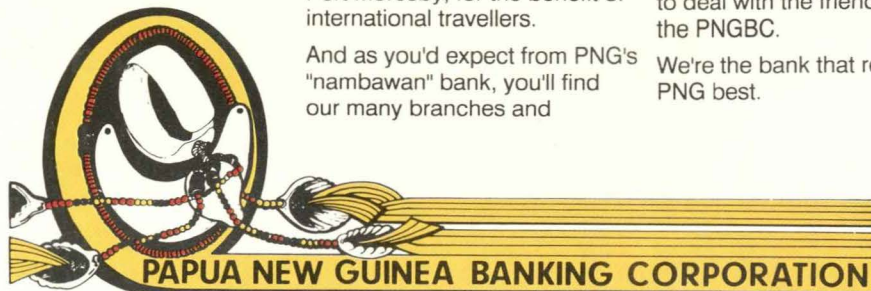
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Story and
photographs by
Joe LoBasso

Diving Mission



The speedboat dashed through the warm tropical waters heading directly for the setting sun. As an eager new American missionary in Papua New Guinea, I was looking forward to my first night-diving adventure. It would be a great opportunity to leave the worries of the day behind and perhaps show the locals some modern spear fishing techniques.

The local mission priest was at the wheel of the boat, steering a steady course towards his home, Muschu Island. The island, 20 kilometres away from my station in



Right Muschu Islanders celebrate sea's riches.



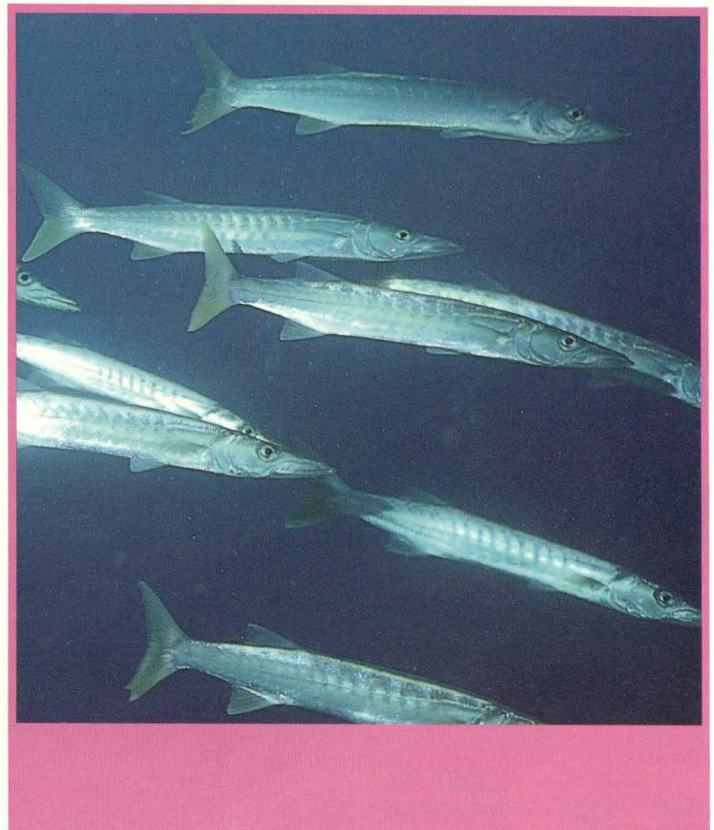
Left A lobster is added to the haul. centre, top Clear water in daylight on the reef. centre, bottom Barracuda.

my fins, precision spear gun, rubber vest, and booties later, items, I was sure, that would make them envious.

"Leave your bag here," said Kumanga. "Just bring your snorkel and mask." Well, I thought, I'd have to break it to them sometime. Not a word was spoken as I pulled out all my gear. One of the men touched my K200 pneumatic Ranger spear gun in disbelief. The locals used home-made spears. Kumanga donned tiny vision-restricting swimmer's goggles. The only other equipment he had was an underwater battery-powered torch and shorts! I felt confident I would not embarrass myself by failing to catch a sizeable quota.

I walked gingerly across the warm sand trying to avoid stepping on rocks and driftwood. The night was as dark as the sea and enveloped me in its warm tropical air. The men were patiently waiting for me when I arrived at the shoreline. I was trailing behind because of the awkwardness of my gear but I felt sure it would soon come in handy.

Father Mike placed a Coleman lantern onto the narrow prow of one of the canoes as I climbed in. As we pushed off, the light cast a penetrating cone to the bottom of the ocean. I was amazed at the visibility. I could clearly see 10 metres below the water. I heard Kumanga whisper: "There's a fish." Before I knew



Wewak, is usually inaccessible to tourists and Father Mike was graciously taking me there to dive with his relatives.

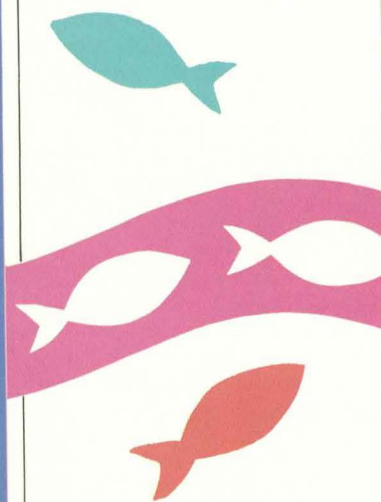
The night was black by the time we arrived at his bush house. I could barely see my way up the rickety steps which led to the uneven 'limbum' (wooden) floor. A lantern hanging in the centre of the room cast a feeble light on several men who were sitting on the floor.

Father Mike's cousin, Kumanga, began to ask me questions in broken English. When I responded in pidgin, everyone's eyes grew wide. Although I struggled with words, the men were impressed by my efforts and helped me along. "Yu gat wanem kain samting long pis?" they asked. "What kind of fishing gear did you bring?"

I mentioned only my snorkel and mask because I was becoming self-conscious about the quantity and quality of the equipment contained in my gear bag. I would show them



Below Author with Muschu Island villager.



4kg parrot fish over his shoulder into the boat, "there's a fish lying on the bottom." I quickly submerged. No fish. I squinted and strained. I saw a faint outline. I couldn't believe it could possibly be a fish. Before I could cock the rod, it was gone.

As the night wore on, I caught two fish. By the end of the night, the others had caught at least 20 apiece, evidenced by the sinking canoe.

The sky was showing off stars as brilliant as diamonds by the time we headed back. Although I had been in the water without a wet suit for four hours, I was amazed that I never became cold. Father

it, the men were slipping out of the canoes right and left. Thud. Kumanga had speared a surgeon fish and threw it into the outrigger while I was still struggling with my fin straps. "Another, over here," called Father Mike from the canoe. Thud. A rainbow fish landed in the boat.

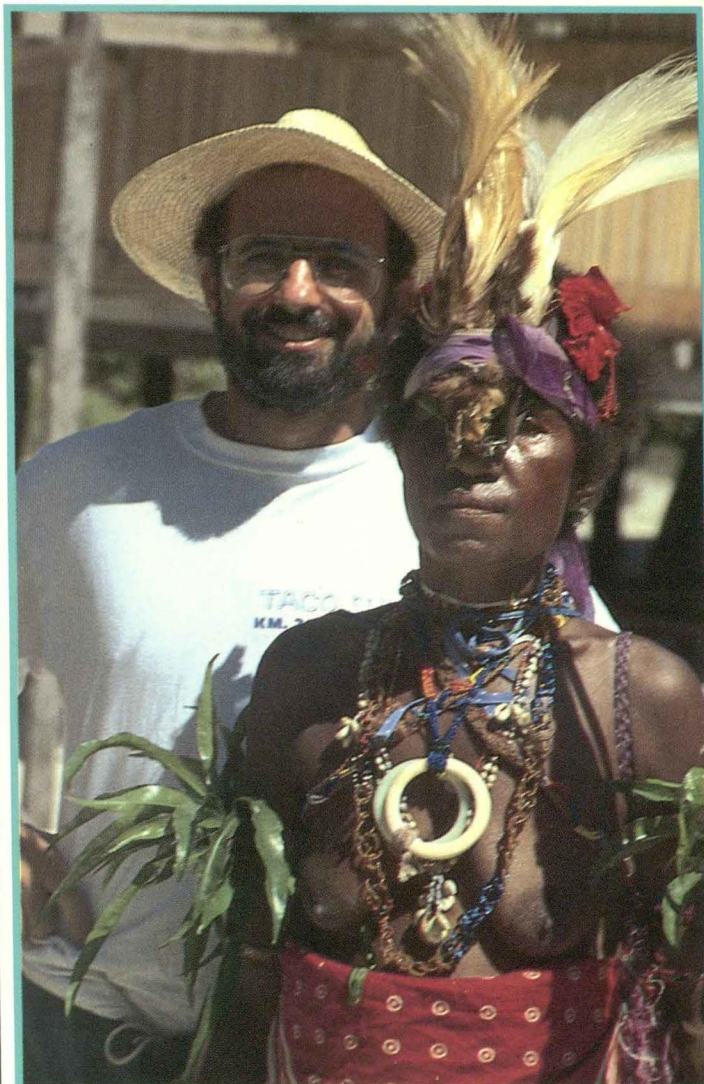
I could see that Kumanga was wondering why I was still in the canoe but said nothing as he threw in a furiously kicking turtle. As I splashed clumsily into the water I heard the thud of another fish being speared. I was anxious to join in the spearing frenzy. I looked around, expecting to see fish all over the place. Something was wrong. Although my torch brightly illuminated the jagged coral bottom, not a fish in sight!

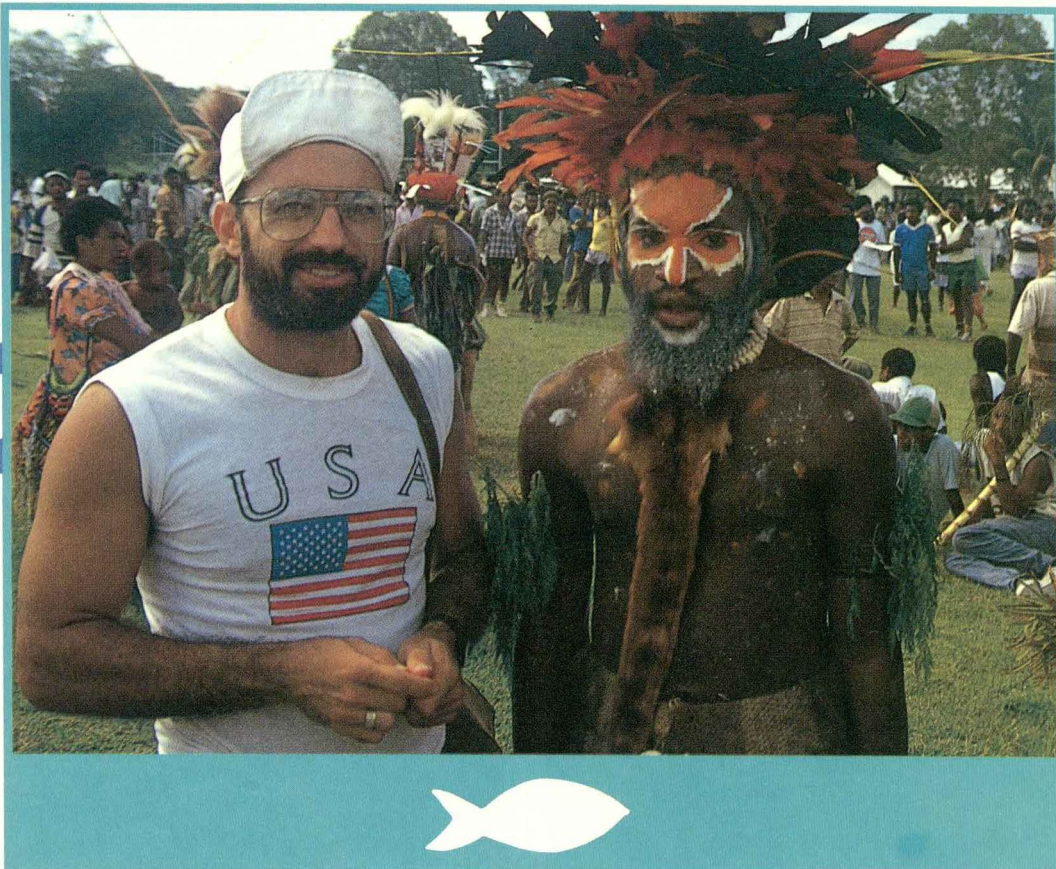
I saw Kumanga surface with yet another catch. How did he do it? "Luk luk gut," he exhorted, "look carefully". I strained my eyes. I saw a

shadow just beyond the beam of my light. I hurriedly cocked the rod into my spear gun, wound the string to the trigger, held the gun out, and aimed. I was hoping the others would see how far I was from my target. Twang. I heard my K30 tip smash into something that didn't sound like a fish.

I began to panic. I felt a hand on my shoulder. "Go isi (go easy)," said Kumanga reassuringly. "We have all night." I slowly pulled back the rod. My tip was badly damaged but luckily, not ruined.

Behind me, there was already a dozen floundering fish in the canoe. "Look Joe," said Kumanga as he tossed a



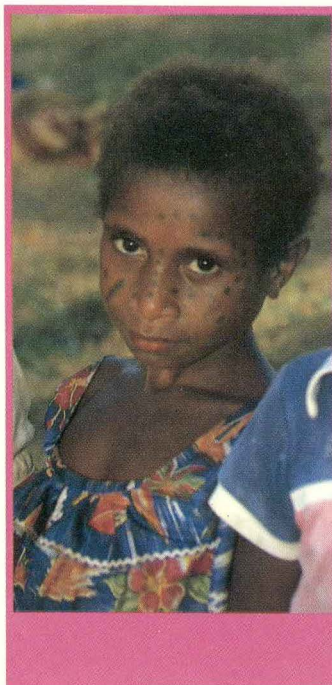


Mike told me the water temperature remained at 25 degrees Celsius all year round. Exhausted and somewhat humiliated, I rode back in silence.

When we arrived on the shore, I was anxious to head for the village and disappear from sight. But I soon realised that the night had just begun. Disappearing into the darkness, the men began picking up knotted driftwood and soon had a blazing fire going.

Pulling fish from the canoe, the men expertly gutted them and placed them on the fire. Much to my surprise, Kumanga had picked the choicest fish for me. I watched him as he turned it over every few minutes, telling the others that this was for Joe. It was obvious that they were all tending my deflated ego. The fire cast a flickering orange glow on our faces as we sat in a circle. My face was burning, but not because of the flames.

After about two hours, Kumanga got up to thank the

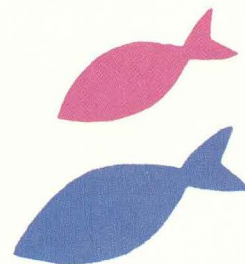


fire for drying us off and for helping us to prepare our fish. As I watched him speak before the fire, I contrasted the American view of nature with the Melanesian view. Generally, the Melanesians see themselves as co-habitants with nature, while we Americans seek to dominate it. Kumanga tenderly put out the dying flames. He then touched my shoulder and said, "It is time to go, poro (friend)." We all walked in silence to the hut. Behind us, a brilliant orange sun began to rise.

I lay down on a coconut husk mattress and let the memory of the quiet waves lapping against the canoe soothe me to sleep.

When I awoke it was already 10am and the tropical heat made sleeping later impossible. I was alone in the hut. Stepping onto the verandah, I realised that my companions had not gone to sleep! They had spent the morning distributing the fish through the village. The spirit of sharing

Top Author and friend. **bottom** Muschu Island girl.



and making sure that every person in the village had enough to eat was a beautiful aspect of village life.

I stood on the porch and took in this little paradise. Swaying palm trees dotted the island's white shoreline. I reflected upon the night. My intentions were to show them some modern spear fishing techniques and teach them a few things about the love of God. But it was obvious that I had done the learning as they lived out brotherly love through their actions. The local divers had completed another successful mission.

The New Islander Hotel

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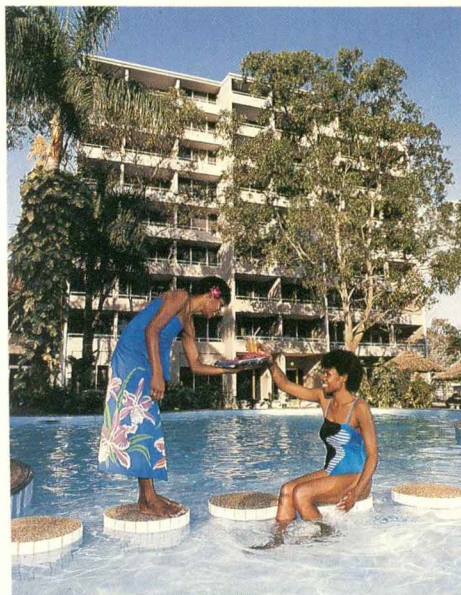
Set in ten acres of tropical gardens, the Islander is located midway between the airport and the city centre, within 5 minutes drive of Central Government Offices, Parliament House and the National Museum.

Facilities include:

- 186 deluxe rooms and suites
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- Florist
- Hire car service
- Hairdressing salon
- Boutique
- News agency
- Coffee shop
- Restaurant
- Cocktail bar
- Night club
- 4 glass backed squash courts
- 2 synthetic grass tennis courts
- Fully equipped gymnasium
- Swimming pool
- Complimentary airport transfers

The location is only one reason you will choose the Islander. The luxurious accommodations together with the superb cuisine, whether it be from our Kofi Haus Coffee Shop, from the elegant Sanamarie A'La Carte restaurant, or from our 24 hour room service, and the professional service from our courteous staff are all reasons why the Islander is Papua New Guinea's only truly International Hotel.

The Pacific has great hotels... the Islander is the great hotel of the Pacific.



The Islander Hotel

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