

Port Vila  
Vanuatu  
South-west Pacific  
May 1993

Here is another in the series of letters from Vanuatu. Alistair Cooke seems to manage letters from America every week, but we struggle to get two or three a year.

We have just celebrated our first Easter in Vanuatu, as our leave has usually been at this time of year in the past. This year, however, we will not be returning to Britain until the end of August, as Ian has just been given a three-month extension to his contract. This will almost certainly be the end of our time in Vanuatu, so we will be looking elsewhere afterwards.

In February, we spent a week on holiday in Rotorua, about one hundred miles south of Auckland in New Zealand. Rotorua is famous for geothermal activity in the form of geysers, mud pools and hot springs. It is also a very civilised place by comparison with Port Vila, since it boasts numerous good shops to say nothing of McDonalds. Port Vila is adequate for day-to-day things, but lacks good clothes or book shops, both of which can add to the quality of life, but subtract from the bank balance.

New Zealand is also the place to which we may go after we finish here in Port Vila. We have no firm plans at all yet, so we will have to wait and see what happens.

At the end of March, Port Vila suffered the worst cyclone since Uma in 1987. Cyclone Prema blew through the islands on March 29th/30th, leaving a considerable amount of destruction on our island of Efate, as well as the neighbouring islands. It is impossible to describe a cyclone to anybody who has not encountered one themselves, but the strength of the wind and the rain are more than anything you will have encountered elsewhere. We were lucky in that our house suffered only minor damage, while two of my colleagues in the Finance Department, one British and one Australian, lost their houses completely. Terry's house lost its roof and he and his son had to shelter under a table for about six hours until the rain and wind abated, while Allan and his wife took refuge in their car. Compared with that, the damage we suffered seems as nothing. Both are now in new houses in a different area of town. Terry's old house will be demolished, but it is believed that Allan's can be repaired.

The cyclone was overnight and our children slept through it despite their windows blowing open. David wanted to know why the floor was wet and why the lights didn't work, while Matthew just splashed about in the water. They are truly growing up now, and David seems so mature now as he works through a book of nursery rhymes, getting them largely correct, though he always seems to forget the cockle shells in Mary, Mary. Humpty Dumpty suffers the same fate as he always did, but the black sheep still has three bags of wool on offer.

David still goes to kindergarten every afternoon. and comes home most afternoons with something he has made and stories about what he has done, He is particularly keen to take books with him, and his books are often read aloud at story-time there. A fascinating song he loves to sing is called Here we go round the paw-paw tree.

Matthew, on the other hand, is too little to go to kindergarten, but is becoming something of an expert on animals and the noises they make. Sometimes it is the cow that says *baa*, but more usually it is the sheep. The other animals love to hear Matthew telling them what they should be saying, and his speech and vocabulary are growing dramatically. He loves to ride his bike and his car and enjoys climbing, sliding and swinging, especially swinging. We all go to the slides and swings quite regularly, and visits to the swimming pool feature much on our programme.

At church, we have been pleased to welcome Frank and Karla back as our leaders. Our Easter morning sunrise service ~(5.30a.m.) had forty-nine adults present, so it certainly seems that the Family Worship Centre has many early risers. The Family Worship Centre has the same problems as every other organisation in town, with people coming and going at regular intervals.

Many other groups are shrinking in size as the number of British Aid officers such as Ian falls. The British Government denies that it is cutting aid to the Pacific. We are not completely convinced. Even so, it seems to be the French speakers who are disappearing from the Bridge Club.

Viv is carrying on doing all the things she used to do. She is still involved with Mama Blong Vanuatu, Playgroup, bridge, church committee and now helps one afternoon a week at kindergarten. Meanwhile Ian still does what he always did at church, at work at with Hash House Harriers. He now hopes to reach 150 runs before leaving Vanuatu, collecting a third pewter tankard for fifty runs.

Last weekend, Viv and Ian visited Pentecost Island to see the land-diving ceremony. Land-diving is a traditional ceremony where men jump off a high platform onto the ground with nothing to protect them but vines tied round their ankles. A successful jump guarantees a bountiful yam harvest. It is said to be one of the most significant rituals surviving in the world today (and was also the original inspiration for bungee jumping).

Other than that, life carries on as usual for the most part. If you are passing, you are very welcome, but be aware that your time is running out if you want to visit the untouched paradise,

That's all for now... all our love

Ian, Viv, David and Matthew