

THE JOURNEY OF VAKA 80

Quote of the Day

"Remember things are not as they always appear."

Saturday

In double hulled canoes they came, the first Cook Island settlers; they were probably from the Society Islands of present day French Polynesia. The year was approximately 500 A.D. It was almost 1000 years later, in 1595 that the first Europeans appeared when Captain Alvarode Mendana of Spain sailed through the area. Then, in the late 18th century (1773-1777) Captain James Cook arrived in the region, followed 37 years later by Philip Goodenough. It wasn't until mid-September 2006 though that Vaka 80 arrived in the Cook Islands.

This team of four determined North Americans arrived to work hand-in-hand with local Rarotongans, offering their skills and services, and eager for opportunities to learn about the Cook Islands.

The team took up residence in the oceanfront Kii Kii Motel and convened for the first time on Saturday afternoon in the community room at the motel. Preliminary orientation and introductions followed, along with essential basics such as operation of an electric kettle, the importance of good crumb control in efforts to dissuade invertebrate-invasion,

and how to correctly greet people, i.e., who kisses whom, and how.

In the predawn hours of the following day, the team members discovered that their travel induced fatigue and sleep deprivation was no match for the piercing vocalizations of one seemingly stationed just below their motel room windows...the Kii Kii Rooster! Unrelenting and intense, the creature assured that all appeared in timely fashion for breakfast that morning.

Being a Sunday, the group accepted an invitation from their team leader Anita, to attend Sunday service at her community Church, the oldest stone church on the island, this proved to be a profound cultural experience, enhanced on this particular Sunday by the presence of a large group of expatriot Cook Islanders from Melbourne, Australia. The walls of the flower-filled old stone Church reverberated throughout the hour and a half long service with the powerful singing of both visitors and local congregants lifting their Maori voice in vibrant praise.

Rivalled almost in magnitude, was the "tea" that followed Church. Donuts, cakes, pancakes, taro with seaweed, manioc, papaya, bananas, and coconut covered huge tables that stretched the length of an entire building. Coconut rolls proved to be a Vaka 80 favorite.

Following this feast, the group was whisked away by their leader and driver, Anita, to the Whale

Research and Education Center. Here marine biologist and founder of the Center, Nan Hauser gave an excellent presentation on whales, dolphins and other marine organisms.

As Nan, and visiting marine expert Dana dashed off to a possible whale sighting, the group returned to the Kii Kii Motel. There, joined by Stripes the resident feline, the team continued with orientation and goal setting.

As Sunday came to a close, members of the Vaka 80 Team headed to their respective rooms to wait the dreaded predawn heralding of the ___ ___ rooster.

Quote of the Day

*"Unless life in the hinterland can be made tolerable the problem of world poverty is insoluble and inevitably get worse."
E.F. Schumacher*

Monday

Vaka 80 gathered around the dining table in our team meeting room for breakfast. Already there is an ease that comes only when "like minded folks gather together. There is no pretence, just the sheer pleasure of sharing the Global Volunteer experience on Cook Island.

Anita started out our morning as she had promised with a language lesson in Rarotongan. Our challenge for the day was..."Kia Orana" (hello); Pe'ea Koe? (How are you?) and Meitaki (thank you).

Wrapping ourselves, or I should say “our tongues” around the vowel sounds is a challenge.

Shortly after breakfast we headed East on the Main Road beginning our tour of the island and the locations where we would be working.

We stopped to look at the excellent craftsmanship of a local artist, Takerou Jim, who creates jewelry and art pieces from the shells of black and brown oysters. The etching of designs on the shells is very intricate and beautiful. Anita commissioned the artist to do a Vaka design for Global Volunteers and we have the option of ordering a pendant or plaque with our name/date of service, etc.

Then we were off to meet with Clare our contact at Tetaveka College where Global Volunteers have assisted with their reading program and helped develop a library for the students. We were shown around the “reading room” where we will work with students on a “one-by-one” basis to encourage them to practice their reading and comprehension. We were told that although the students are shy at first, they do look forward to reading with the Global Volunteers. There are over 60 students in need of tutoring and encouragement in reading. I would also think there is an opportunity, as Jim would say, “to make some smiles.” Ideally we would work with each student 3 times a week.

From there, we drove to the Takitumu Conservation Area. We drove through orchards of papaya, bananas, and oranges. There were also fields of

taro plants and other vegetables growing. At the gate of the Conservation Area we were greeted by mosquitoes and the sound of laughter and talking from the bush. Much to our delight, it was the choir and pastor (ex-patriot Cook Islanders) from Melbourne, Australia who we had enjoyed so much at Church the previous day. A perfect time to practice our new Rarotangan greeting , "Kia Orana" as they passed by us. We also had the opportunity to meet Ian, the manager of the conservation area.

Back on the main road, we headed west to see the local prison. But, more importantly, it was the site of where Anita's great-grandfather lived when he first came to the Cook Islands. Stacie had requested visiting the prison site, and it turned into a great "photography opportunity", as well as a chance to hear about Anita's great grandfather who was a Botanist and Poet who had made his mark on the Cook Island culture. The large lychee tree still standing on the prison grounds was planted by him and propagated to grow on other parts of the island.

We drove by Rarotonga Resort and turned around at the Edgewater Resort so we could go up the hill to the hospital to meet Anita's father who is a patient there. The vista from the hospital is awesome, but I think we were equally as charmed by a group of baby chicks following their Mother Hen.

We passed by the airport on our way to Avarua where we stopped to visit the Creative Centre which

is a beautiful facility. They are also asking for a Global Volunteer to be a teacher's aide.

Anita buzzed us around the little town pointing out the National Library and Museum as well as the Cook Island Library and Museum. Nancy, Stacie and Jim opted to stay in town; Danice headed back to the Kii Kii was a long awaited walk on the beach. Vaka 80 gathered in the meeting room to prepare for our guests. Niki, head of the Red Cross brought us a wide variety of local food for our dinner. The menu consisted of the following dishes:

- octopus
- tar greens (the topes) cooked almost to a puree with coconut cream and onion,
- taro
- bananas (grown upright – bright yellow)
- over ripe bananas cooked with tapioca and sweet coconut sauce
- chicken
- coconut (mature)
- papaya with shredded coconut
- ikamata - salad with raw fish that had been treated in lemon and vinegar.
- coconut pancakes

Anita tapped into the top of the young coconuts to give a drink of the coconut juice or milk.

Our guests for the evening were Vereana, the executive director of CIANGO (Cook Island Association of Non Government Organizations), a spirited Cook Island woman who told us that she

understands the concept of “volunteer” because since she retired from her government job, her work with CIANGO has been primarily as a volunteer.

Clare, a teacher from Tetevaka College also talked about her years of volunteer work in New Zealand.

Ian, the manager of Takitumu Conservation Project did an excellent power point presentation of the project and the success of their project.

An incredible day packed full of beautiful sights around and across the Island of Rarotonga; stories; history; the honor of meeting Anita’s father; visits to our project sites; and lunch with Anita at Mac’s Café; plus an evening with wonderful local people and the opportunity to enjoy the local cuisine. Anita, you rock! We feel your love for your people, your passion for your work, and we are keenly aware of how much you give to so many.

Quote of the Day

“Travel in a spirit of humility, with a genuine desire to learn more about the people of your host country.”

Tuesday

...and they are off! After days of preparation Vaka 80 finally dipped its oars into the ocean for the first time. The “race” shall we say has begun. The day began on a high note or more literally the lack thereof, as our friendly rooster generously offered

us a few extra hours of sleep before beckoning us to breakfast. Per the norm, Vaka 80 refused to let a gathering go by without a lesson. The topic this morning was the proper way to make a cup of tea. After breakfast, Anita steered our vessel toward the college so we could begin tutoring the students in reading. The majority of the staff seemed welcoming and we were invited to Clare's classroom. Clare is the head of the English Department. We were asked to introduce ourselves to the class. Amongst other interesting facts, we all learned from Stacie that it actually gets so cold in Minnesota that you can drive cars on the lakes...the students were both amused and bewildered. We all seemed to agree that the students as a whole were wonderful. Most were extremely shy to begin with, but for most, it was not long before cracks in the hard exterior began to appear. Tea time provided us with an opportunity to get hot water from a "zip" while lunch time provided us an opportunity to watch the students compete in a variety of field events including, but not limited to, the shot put, javelin, high jump, long jump and discus. Additionally, we got a glimpse of a game called "handball" which apparently is quite similar to the game of "four square" in the United States, only it's played with a tennis ball. After completing a successful first day in the reading program, and catching the bus home without any snags, we headed back to the Kii Kii to enjoy some rest and walks on the beach. Before dinner, we had an opportunity to visit the library and the museum where we continued our education into the culture and history of the Cook Islands. Fortunately, the

stop also provided an opportunity for Jim and Stacie to gather information on how a Cook Islander could become an attorney after a very inquisitive and assertive student had approached them earlier in the day and had a lot of questions pertaining to this goal of hers. The ride also provide the group time to see pictures of Danice's beautiful family...we have all really enjoyed learning about each other along with the beautiful island we met one another on. Our day ended with dinner, but not before Anita steered the group around one more hidden buoy...a lesson in how to wear a Paraou. If nothing else was learned, we all knew by the end of the lesson to "cover your knickers" and "lock your boobies."

Quote of the Day

"A community awakened to the possibility of achieving their collective hopes and dreams is a powerful force, a force that holds the promise of new life and self-reliance"

Wednesday

Vaca 80 seems to have fallen comfortably into its routine. We again gathered for breakfast at 7:00 am, followed by our daily morning meeting at 7:30 am. Then we were off to our second day of volunteering at the Titikaveka College.

We were more comfortable reading with the students today, and they seemed more comfortable with us. Danice even had a breakthrough with a young lady who had been very reluctant to engage

with Stacie yesterday. It seems that the students won't take long to warm up to us.

Over lunch, Stacie and Jim had the pleasure of helping the teaching staff with a 1500 meter race. Stacie and Jim timed the runners, as first the girls, then the boys, ran barefoot 5 times around a dirt and grass 300 meter track. We have all enjoyed watching the kids participate in various track and field events over their lunch break. It has also been exciting to see the teachers eagerly help time, measure and organize the events over what seems to be their only lunch break of the day, too.

Anita graciously picked us up after work, as she was on her way to town, and dropped some of us at the Kii Kii and took those who were interested into town. We spent the rest of the afternoon in town or by the pool or walking on the beach, enjoying an afternoon of free time. Then we all met again for dinner in the Vaca Lounge at 6:30 pm, catered by Rosie per the usual. As usual, dinner was very good and we all enjoyed chatting and getting to know each other better. One major pre-dinner topic of conversation was Anita's unique orange vintage mini, which everyone enjoyed look at, especially when Anita showed us how the steering wheel comes completely off just by pulling on it.

After dinner, we went our separate ways to walk, read, or go to bed, ready for our third day on the job.

Thursday

Day broke with the usual cacophony of sounds; Maori refrains on Radio Cook Island, mingling with the determined cries of our feathered friend and the constant beat of the Pacific's ebb and flow. On waking though, the sense perceived that something was different. The dawn light through the gap in the window drapes shone dim and a new sound blended in; it was raining, or rather pouring. Heavy streams of water fell from the motel roofs and a thick grey mist hung over the usually brilliant early morning surf. A few mynah birds gathered on the motel railings, seeking refuge and shaking the deluge from their sodden plumage.

It was a cool and soggy start to the day. The rain finally let up in the late morning but the sun struggled to make any appearance and grey prevailed. At school many students failed to arrive and the playing field was covered in places with pools of rainwater. Jim remarked that the general atmosphere was reminiscent of a snow day back home.

Clare introduced a new project, the cataloging of library books and the job was quickly embraced by Danice. Jim continued his computer assignment and Stacie and Nancy continued seeing students for reading help and were also able to lend a hand with the book cataloging.

Lunch followed, after which Danice and Jim labored on. Stacie and Nancy set out in search of more

readers only to return to “headquarters” sometime later, laden with woven baskets, belts, bracelets, rings, balls and even spectacles made of palm leaf fronds...how did this happen?

Following a grueling day, sustenance for the long journey home was provided by the introduction of yet another Cook Island cultural phenomena the Cadbury’s Pink. Discovered only two days earlier by Jim, the team both rejoiced and lamented, wondering how life will go on back in the USA where this particular delight is not known to exist.

Peace Day concluded, aptly enough with attendance at the “Peace in Paradise” program, a Cook Island phenomenon all its own. Through song, drama, and dance, much of it culturally unique to this nation, worldwide peace was advocated. Perhaps globally speaking this is a futile pursuit, perhaps locally it is not, for their coming together to produce “Peace in Paradise” this culturally mixed little community maybe doing here, just what they wish for the rest of the world.

Quote of the Day

*“Do all the good you can,
By all the means you can,
In all the ways you can,
In all the places you can.”*

Friday

The team appears to have found a nice rhythm as it approaches the marker signally the halfway point.

To turn the corner with the most efficiency, it was necessary for us to each showcase some of our individual skills today. Nancy was sent to the home of a child suffering from cerebral palsy and provided assistance to her Mother by spending the day with Tapaeru, reading to her and assisting her Mother, Nancy in preparing for a wedding. Jim and Stacie were sent to the Conservation Area where they spent a grueling, but beautiful, day with Linda clearing trails in the rain forest. Jim even got to see the endangered Kakerori bird. Danice, meanwhile, helped a group of disabled individuals at the Create Centre prepare for an upcoming show where they sell their art to raise money for the center. Rumor has it that she can cut flowers from paper that looked so real that the center was keeping them in water to keep them from dying. (smile)

After a hard day of paddling in weather that was a bit cooler than the team was accustomed to (65 instead of the usual 75 degrees), the team set off for a little ship that had un a shore and sold fish and chips from the deck. De----licious! The day ended with a fantastic traditional Cook Islands performance by the students at St. Joseph's School. We enjoyed watching Ruth, on of the managers at the Kii Kii Motel and her children participate in the performance. Two of the youngest performers stole our hearts, but all of the students, their outfits and the music were terrific (as was the can of Jolly Lime!)

Quote of the Day

"You cannot judge a book by its cover."

Monday

Jackets, sweaters, and other warm gear were the order of the day as we began our second work week in this tropical paradise. A cold persistence rain accompanied by gusty winds prevailed throughout the day. At school, even hardy students were complaining that the rain was expected to continue for three days.

Undaunted we fell back into our school-day routine at Titkaveka College, reading with students and working on library needs. The data base that Jim had been working on was now complete and put into use.

As we gathered for supper, heavy rains continued. Anita cam to the rescue with additional warm clothing for those in need while at the same time providing ice cream for an after-dinner treat.

The evening meal was followed by the mid-program service review. Much discussion and some debate took place; constructive suggestions emerged. Finally, plans for the remainder of the week were presented, which for most members of this small group triggered the realization that all too few days of our experience remained.

Disbanding, we set off in search of blankets hoping that our friend Clare was meteorologically misinformed.

Quote of the Day

"It takes courage to stand up and speak, but also to sit down and listen."

Tuesday

Once again we awoke to the sound of rain and stepped out into a cold, damp day. We arrived at the school in sweaters, scarves, fleece vests and en socks under our flip-flops for some of us. We read with children at the school and worked in the library trying to make a dent in the seemingly insurmountable pile of books that need cataloguing. We managed to get a significant number of books on the shelves, mostly as result of Danice's hard work last week in the library, and we were pleasantly surprised to see students check out a book that we had just recently catalogued, showing us that every single book we get on the shelves makes a difference, even if we can't get through them all.

Then we went our separate ways to enjoy a rainy afternoon checking e-mail, visiting the library, walking on the beach or going for a run. We gathered for dinner and conversation, and then headed for bed.

Quote of the Day

"Give a flower and the scent lingers on your fingers."

Wednesday

Vaca 89 took the spring rainstorm in stride, but for a few damp shoes left out to dry...we were up and eager to start out our 12th day. Miguel's pancakes and Anita's greeting of "Kia Orana" and bright smile are a kick start to anyone's day! After a meeting to discuss the logistics of the last couple days, we were off to see our students at Tititaveka College. As Danice, Nancy Jim and Stacie walked into the library, she couldn't help but take note of how comfortable they were, and also reflect on the fact that they will be missed by the students when they leave. Each in their own way has brought a special ingredient to add to the established Global Volunteers reading program, and to each other's lives as a fellow volunteers and Vaca 80 team members who will always treasure the memory of their time together on the Cook Islands.

Danice responded to a request to serve as an "in-class" tutor for three at-risk students, Rouina, Unga and Timi. She had a good day getting to know Rouina and the teachers. She is very excited about the opportunity of working with the students. The team waited for the bus under the awning of the little store that has become famous for its rather large inventory of "Pinky's". Jim also challenged his pallet with a "ginger beer"... The team parted ways at the Kii Kii with Jim and Stacie continuing to town

and Danice and Nancy hoping to take a walk on the beach. But, the rain prevailed and soaked Jim and Stacie on their walk back from town, with the exception of the time they gratefully spent in car of a local Democrat, who not only offered them a ride, but filled them in on his view of last night's local election. Nancy and Danice had stayed warm and dry in the comfort of their Kii Kii rooms while our team leader Anita was out bucking the waves with her paddling team.

The real surprise came when Anita took us to dinner at the Kikau Hut Restaurant. Nancy had her fill of vegetarian curry, Anita her pasta and chips, Jim beef stroganoff, and Danice enjoyed a tasty sea scallop in mornay sauce...but the "hot dish" for the night was Stacie's delectable but extra hot chicken curry dish! The welcoming ambiance of the restaurant, good food, gathering around the table with friends made the evening a "10"! Anita, you rock!!

Quote of the Day

"Every single day, great things are done by ordinary people."

Thursday

Winners! This is how we all feel as Vaka 80 can finally see the finish line. That signal, the end of a successful race. In reflecting upon the amazing journey, we took part in over the last two weeks, it is odd how the obstacles that challenged us throughout the race seem so distant. It is a time of

both elation and sadness. We have all overcome much to win this very important race to improve the lives of our co-inhabitants on this earth. But, along the way we have forged unexpected relationships with one and another, and it will be difficult to say goodbye. Our penultimate day in the program took Stacie, Danice and Nancy back to Titikaveka College to continue the reading program we have spent most of our time participating in. Danice has begun to take a more long-term role in the school, tutoring students that are at risk of dropping out of school. The team is confident those students are being left in capable hands. Stacie and Nancy, in addition to reading with students, also had an opportunity to assist in the classroom of some of the teachers and enjoyed the experience. Jim spent the morning at the local Senior Citizen Center visiting the "Mamas". He had a great time listening to their stories, learning about their lives and sharing a few laughs. Jim spent the afternoon scanning maps with Nan Hauser, the head of the Whale Research Center.

The late afternoon and night we were on our own. Nancy and Danice went back to the Kii Kii to enjoy our first day of sunshine in awhile, and Stacie and Jim competed in a lock 5K (that ended up being a little longer) on the other side of the island. We are all certain to sleep well in preparation of our final day tomorrow.

Quote of the Day

"We cannot do great things. We can only do little things with great love." Mother Theresa

Friday

This was the last morning meeting for Vaca 80 team members, Nancy, Jim and Stacie. Only Danice remains on board for the rest of the voyage.

Following the daily routine, Anita drove Nancy, Jim and Stacie to Titikaveka College, where they were honored by the staff for their service to the school with shell necklaces made by the students. They also attended the Maori Class for a lesson on the "coconut". They watched a young student climb to the top of the palm tree and shake down coconuts. Danice walked the beach route to the Creative Centre where she had a productive day helping everyone paint Christmas tree Ornaments. Nancy joined her for the afternoon and helped the group with a paper mache project. All in preparation for the Creative Centre's upcoming sale at the Saturday Market. Jim and Stacie spent the afternoon at the Wale Center dusting shelves.

The four of us were invited to tea at CIANGO (Cook Island Association of Non-government Organizations). CIANGO is Global Volunteers host on the Cook Islands. The director, Veriana, invited us to say thank you and goodbye to those that were leaving.

We met Johnny Frisbie at Stefano's Italian Restaurant for dinner. It was delightful to hear stories of her life on Pukapuka Island and the adventures of growing up with her siblings and Father, Robert Dean Frisbie, a well-known author. Johnny has written a biography of her family entitled, "The Frisbies of the South Seas".

Quote of the Day

"Each of us is the author of our own story, and there is a new page to be written every day."

Monday

The Vaka 80 meeting room looked deserted when Danice arrived for breakfast and morning meeting. Tables stripped of their bright colored cloths looked as lonely as she felt. Her team member, Nancy Murphy had left on Saturday evening for New York after completing her two week commitment to Global Volunteers. Jim Colling and Stacie Nelson have also said their goodbyes, but they will enjoy the islands of Aitu and Aitutaki before they complete their Cook Island experience. As if Anita, anticipated that this first day without the rest of the team would be a lonely one for Danice, she arrived with her usual cheery smile and an invitation to join her for breakfast at her sister June's private school, Te Uki Ou.

My schedule allowed me some time before classes started to check Nooroa Tua and Rouina's homework before class started. Rouina had

completed his assignment and presented his work to the class. Everyone applauded him for a job well done. He just beamed with pride. The students did well in Math and Social Science, but the first real homework session was too short because Danice had to catch the bus.

The evening was very pleasant with Danice and Anita going out for dinner at The Nu Bar. It was the perfect ending to what turned out to be a great day.

Quote of the Day

"It is often the small actions of our lives that, over time, have the greatest influence on the world."

Tuesday

Vaka 80 continues on its journey. Our steerer, Anita keeps the team of one on course. Danice continues her work at Titikaveka College. The teachers are pleased with the progress of the students, Rouina, Nooroa Tua, and Dominique. Her primary role as an in-class tutor is to keep the boys focused on their work and completing their assignments. Danice is learning that the boys are willing, but often lack the basic skills necessary to be successful in their 8th grade classroom. For example, because some of the boys do not know their basic math skills, it is a stumbling block for them. The boys appear to be comfortable with Danice and they are trying very hard.

Anita surprised Danice by picking her up from the school. She showed her the route she would be running in tonight's relay race around the island. Local adult teams compete in the relay, as well as many of the school children run on teams. Danice watched some of teams run by the Kii Kii Motel. Many of the students at Titikaveka College have talked about liking to run, but Anita thinks that Rugby, Net Ball and Soccer are probably the favorite island sports. Paddling is becoming a popular sport, but unfortunately not everyone has access to a boat.

Anita took Danice to a new eating venue, where they enjoyed excellent Indian cuisine. Both of them had received phone calls from loved ones today; Danice from her daughter and granddaughter in Portland, Oregon, and Anita from her husband in Iraq. The both felt blessed to hear from them...it made the day very special.

Quote of the Day

"Learn to bloom where you are planted."

Wednesday

Danice joined Anita for breakfast and the early morning meeting. Danice was eager to get to school so she would have time to check her student's homework before class. The students are making progress and it is very exciting. At lunch time, Danice watched the 8th grade boys high jump, and they acknowledged her with, "Hey Miss...watch

this..." She feels like the students are feeling comfortable with her "in and out" of the classroom. During her break, she made a homework assignment sheet for the students to write down their daily assignments. It is similar to what we would call a student planner in the states.

The rest of the day was spent writing letters and taking a long walk on the beach. From the balcony of the Kii Kii, she could see their fearless Vaka 80 Team Leader paddling her Vaka around the buoy and head for home. She is definitely a "water warrior".

We had a late dinner at the "Whatever" and listened to some live Island music. The "Whatever" is a favorite spot for locals and tourists. Only two days left for Vaca 80!

Quote of the Day

"Believe that life is good and that any bad can be made better. Once you are able to do this, you are unstoppable."

Thursday

Anita and Danice met for breakfast of cereal and tea in the Vaka 80 team meeting room. They had the team meeting and Danice was off for another day at the school. Much to Danice's surprise, Rouina was the only one there. Apparently, the other two boys, Dominique and Nooroa Tua had taken the day off to go to the elementary school's athletic day. The teachers lamented that frequent absences really

does interfere with the educational proves. But, Rouina came to English class with his homework completed! Much to the delight of his teacher and the class, he voluntarily raised his hand to answer a question for the first time. He was also one of the few students who had already started on the next assignment. We had been working on it earlier in our study session, and he continued writing at home. Danice also worked with the student librarians for a while helping to catalog books. The day was very warm and humid but it didn't stop students from high-jumping and playing had ball during their lunch break. During tea, Danice had an opportunity to talk with the PE teacher who has been slow to warm up to her. They had a great conversation in which he gave her some cultural tips on the change in the Cook Islanders way of life. In particular, the food they eat and the increase of cars/motorbikes has affected their health.

Danice Cooled off with a walk on the beach and had dinner at the "little ship that had run a ground" not too far from the Kii Kii Motel. And, she also took time to enjoy a cup of tea to end a very busy, but fulfilling day, nearly wrapped in her paraou.

Quote of the Day

"Go through life singing. It makes the journey more fun."

Friday

As we start out the last day of Vaka 80, Danice turned in her evaluation of her journey. We headed to the Creative Center where more Christmas tree

ornaments waiting to be painted. Everyone is working hard to get as many items completed as possible to sell at the Saturday Market.

On her way back to the Kii Kii Motel, Dnaice stopped at Mac's Café. This day was one she will always remember because it demonstrated the extremes and similarities of the concept of the "have and have not" nation was demonstrated right before her eyes. While at Mac's, Danice watched one of the disabled adults almost get hit by cars driving by on the busy road, not once, but several times. The woman just wanted to pick and give flowers to the women at the café. Unfortunately, the flowers were on the other side of the road. She was so intent on her goal that she was oblivious to the traffic. When one of the women from Mac's tried to make sure she got across the road safely, the woman became agitated and confrontational. Finally, her Mom was called, but when she arrived, she was met with the same problem. We all watched as this loving Mom did all the right things to calm her daughter enough to get her on board the scooter for the ride home. I can't begin to imagine the challenges facing this Mom. It drove home the importance of programs like the Creative Center of Adults with Disabilities, not only for the instruction and care of her daughter, but for the valuable respite time it affords the Mother.

In our little community of "Kii Kii", "we" have a young child (maybe 3 years old), who lives with a man believed to be her father. The loving housekeepers keep watch over the unattended child

during the day as they do their work, but she is often unattended, either playing in the swimming pool or wandering around the property. She has minimal language skills and doesn't know her name when asked. Anita says, "that Cook Islanders will automatically take care of children..." in this case that role falls on the housekeepers and the managers. The father is rarely outside his room. With the ocean, swimming pool and busy street, one cannot help worrying about this little one.

Before we went to dinner, we stopped by the hospital to visit Vereana, the Director of CIANGO, our host organization. The hospital care is a sobering experience as family members are expected to do the basic care of their family members, bathing, changing beds, etc. The nurses only administer medications. We found Vereana in a ward with six other patients and not looking well at all. She was on oxygen and battling a condition where her body was retaining fluids. It was difficult to see her so ill. Anita explained the inadequacies of the health care system on the island, and the reason Cook Islanders who can afford it go to New Zealand for health care, but unfortunately not many can afford it.

The "one on one" time has given me the opportunity to learn more about the Cook Island culture, and the problems an island community faces, high cost of living, low wages, inadequate health care and social services. In spite of all these hardships, Cook Islanders are always smiling and laughing.