

Iumi nao

You and me now

Us together

The rainy season had just begun. They said that it was the first time in a few years that it seemed like a normal rainy season. The sky was hazy, overcast light grey

He stood between me, and the rusting ship. "You take photo me!" I feigned ignorance. "Mi no savvy?!" Close up his eyes were yellow blurred, mouth red with betel nut juice. The menacing dissipated.

Really, really hot.

Really, really humid.

1940 Colonial Development and Welfare Act.

Rubbish piled up on the ledge of the concrete canopy. The library was locked. It was very hazy and the sky blurred into the palm trees. The whole place seemed dusty.

He poked at the rubbish with a stick. He pulled out some kind of clothing, laid it out on the concrete ramp. He looked straight at me. I was glad he didn't confront me. I half expected he might.

1953 Western Pacific High Commission Secretariat moved to Honiara.

Returning to the car Philip forthrightly introduced himself. He liked New Zealand. He was a teacher. "Iu savvy lukim fo me sum fala opportunity fo study long New Zealand, some fala scholarship?" We talked for some time. Generally he steered the conversation to what opportunities there may be for him to come to NZ. In return he would help with my research. He gave me his email address. He sent me a cv.

1950s and some 60s government buildings were leaf houses, the secretariat and administrative offices, and government housing.

It was originally grey exposed block-work, which had been difficult to get "nice and square". Even though unpainted concrete blocks usually absorbed the moisture this was ok as the building was internally lined. The concrete ramp was necessary due to the high numbers disabled by polio.

I went into the hot sun to look back at the buildings from a distance.

There were no lights on. It was very dim, cool and quiet. The bookshelves heavily varnished and many empty. The books looked like those in op-shops at home. There was a long magazine shelf. It seemed dusty, and grimy.

Built 1961- 62 Public Works Department (PWD)

roads

bridges

government buildings

electricity

ports

airport

water supply

furniture for government houses

maintenance

The entranceways had been blocked in. The tennis courts and bowling green completely abandoned - broken, long grass, rubbish, with chickens scratching around. It was now the "Japanese Development Authority" a few small signs informed me. There was another entranceway now.

Three young boys sat under a mango tree entertained by a mobile phone. Occasionally older boys wandered through and climbed the metal rungs of the fire escape up to second level.

If you waited and watched carefully toads hopped, trying to escape the scorching heat by searching for shade under debris. I remembered treading water in the deep end with girlfriends, and the little puffer fish, pumped in somehow through the pipes from the sea.

I remembered the inflow and outflow holes in the corner where the seawater came in.

Materials:

Bankline from UK - brought in cement and fittings (UK goods and food also)
Burns Philp Line from Australia - brought in materials such as corrugated iron

first:

timber frames

asbestos fibro

hardboard linings

cane fibre sheets for ceiling (sagged if got wet)

later:

steel frames

masonry blocks

cement

Treated timber came later from treatment plants on various islands that did logging.

The geography teacher introduced himself to me. We shook hands. His mouth was reddened with betel nut, teeth decayed and blackened. The school was quiet, due to end of year exams and marking. In the library metal shelves lined a wall. Some rubbish and a paper cup lay on the shelves empty of books. Stacked yellow wrapped A4 packages were piled on tables. Exam papers sent from the provinces for marking. A fan circled swinging.

1950s progress and development “slow and hampered.”

Haze smoked from cooking and garden fires. A village, the leaf roofs and paths leading beyond through grass. There were some clearings where cassava was cultivated in mounds of earth. Pijin sounds and laughter mixed with myna squawking.

Scaffolding was holding up the concrete canopy above the entrance, plaster work and concrete chipped away. Steel reinforcing visible. Little piles of broken concrete swept together on the bottom step.

I hadn't noticed. I realise he has been watching me closely. "Fucking whiteman - hemi come long country bilong mi, takem staka photo". I pack away the camera and return to the car.

A large lump of timber smouldered gently on the grassy verge by the road at the front. Rubbish was scattered around. A man was selling the "Solomon Star" on the corner, early morning business becoming brisk.

Noticing an old post box lying on the ground, I tried to remember our old post box number - 282? 242?

An ANZ ATM in the corner in a darker blue. A large ANZ sign out front.

On my last visit I noticed a big shiny new sign above the post boxes: "AXIOM build, share, protect". Axiom is an Australian company who mine nickel here. It was the only image I took. The sky was blue that day.

YOU ME NOW