

Interview by Jonathan Ritchie and Musawe Sinebare with Willy Pomat, Papua New Guinea, 9 July 2014

MA, Immunology, UNSW, 1992-1993; PhD, UWA, 2001-2004

[00:00:05]	Received two AusAID scholarships: one in 1992–93 to do a master's at the University of New South Wales (UNSW), in Sydney, and the other in 2001 to do a PhD at the University of Western Australia (UWA), in Perth. The first trip was culturally difficult, especially for his wife, living in a block of flats but not knowing the neighbours. He went there to study immunology and had to spend a lot of time at the university. He had to work with rats, rather than people as he was used to, and that was a challenge. Also, he had to do everything, lab assistant work like cleaning the rats, as well as doing the research. And his main supervisor died. It was hard but he got the research done. Then he had trouble writing his thesis back in Papua New Guinea (PNG) with work commitments etc. It took him two years.	Scholarship opportunities; Studying in Australia; Living in Australia; Family; Challenges
[00:03:30]	He had to wait a while to get a scholarship to do his PhD because AusAID had changed its policy, he had to apply in the normal pool and women were prioritised. Initially he was accepted at the University of Canberra but it wasn't one of the universities where AusAID had students so he had to find another university and he had a contact at UWA. So he went there and Peter Richmond was his supervisor.	Scholarships application process
[00:06:28]	Peter had just got back from the UK and they had to set up the lab and everything they needed. His research was based on saliva samples from Aboriginal children, taken before and after vaccination and antibiotic treatment. [Explanation about the relevance of his research to PNG: many infants die of pneumonia in PNG caused by the same bacteria that causes middle ear infections in Australia.] He did the research within two years but it took five years, back in PNG, to write his dissertation. He found academic science writing difficult but learnt a lot.	Studying in Australia; Returning to PNG; Challenges
[00:11:07]	The UWA PhD program had weekly seminars where students presented work or reviewed a paper, it was terrifying but helped him develop confidence in speaking and read more widely. When he was back in PNG in 2005 some colleagues from UWA came and helped set up a lab with funds from the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Welcome	Studying in Australia; Ongoing connections with Australia; Collaborative research

	Trust.	
[00:14:23]	[Comments about the vaccine trials they have been doing, in collaboration with UWA and a group in Melbourne, and the benefits the research has brought.] Is still doing collaborative research with Australian colleagues.	Ongoing connections with Australia
[00:18:24]	In 2011 he went back for his graduation and was selected as the valedictorian. While in Australia he mostly associated with Papua New Guineans. He was president of the PNG student group. [Comments about Independence Day celebrations being run by and more accessible to Papua New Guineans for the first time in 2002.] He tried to send out-of-date medical supplies to PNG but couldn't get them through customs. They only went to church occasionally in Australia. He was involved in a conference at Aboriginal communities.	Returning to Australia; Socialising in Australia; PNG community in Australia; Leadership; Community activities in Australia
[00:22:48]	He collaborates with his supervisor and colleagues from UWA, and other academics in the field. His work now is a continuation of his PhD. Other students from PNG have gone to UWA to study.	Ongoing connections with Australia
[00:22:48]	After getting his PhD he was appointed deputy director and so his role has been more administrative, less related to his PhD. [Discussion about the challenges of having a management role, especially financial management.]	Post-scholarship career; Leadership
[00:29:29]	The biggest lesson of the scholarship was trying to make the fortnightly money last, it was enough to live simply on. [Comments about how difficult is often is for people returning from studying in Australia to find funding, beyond their own salaries, to continue their research in PNG.]	Scholarship experience; Living in Australia
[00:33:51]	[Interviewer thanks Dr Pomat.]	
[00:36:09]	END	