

Interview by Jemma Purdey with Lalen Simeon, Port Moresby, 16 December 2014

PhD, IT in Education, University of Wollongong, 1998-1999; 2002-2004.



[00:00:48]	<p>From New Ireland Province, an isolated region in the north. Even today there is no electricity. Previously there were flights there but now you have to get there by boat, not a good experience. Next week Lalen will go there with her family for the first time in 13 years. It was quite tough growing up there but her father was a teacher and her parents took her and her younger brother to Madang. She never saw her older brother and sister because they were away at boarding school. She speaks five languages from moving around with her parents. Even though her father was a teacher he didn't encourage her to go to school and he home schooled her using the Bible. Her mother had only been to Grade 3 but she knew things and guided Lalen.</p>	<p>Family background; Childhood; Early education</p>
[00:04:36]	<p>When she was 14 they went back to their island and her parents sent her to an Adventist boarding school. It was hard living away from home with few clothes or school equipment. Her father did Grade 5 then was trained to be a teacher but was more like a health worker, giving injections etc.</p>	<p>Childhood; Early education</p>
[00:08:14]	<p>In Madang her father worked at a Seventh Day Adventist school but shared ideas with western Catholic teachers and missionaries, from Italy and Scotland. Lalen wanted to be a doctor but didn't get high enough marks so she enrolled in nursing. It was hard for girls to do Year 11 in</p>	<p>Family background; Undergraduate education</p>

	those days but she dropped nursing and did it, with the help of her brother. That was 1985. She finished Year 12 but never dropped the dream of nursing until 2002 when she was doing postgraduate studies.	
[00:12:27]	After finishing school she did a diploma of teaching at Pacific Adventist College [now Pacific Adventist University – PAU] for two years, then taught for two years and decided not to pursue a degree in education. She changed to office admin. After finishing that diploma she decided to go back to education and did the degree. In 1995 PAU offered her a job as executive secretary to the vice-chancellor, deputy vice-chancellor and registrar. She did that for a year and met an expat Fijian who had studied at the university of Wollongong and became her role model. Without telling her bosses or husband she applied for a scholarship, not thinking she would be accepted, but she was.	Undergraduate education; Early career; Connection with Australia; Application for scholarship
[00:16:07]	In those days the scholarships were flexible. [Story about telling her boss and husband and her bosses arranging with AusAID to defer the scholarship.] She and her husband went in 1998 on a family scholarship for two years.	Scholarships experience; Family; Living in Australia
[00:20:35]	She applied to the University of Wollongong because of her role model. She had an English test and an induction course when she got to Wollongong. The induction was very good and the introduction to the library was what inspired her to do research, the woman who did that became Lalen's new role model.	Motive to choose university; Arriving in Australia; Friendship
[00:24:19]	The university coordinated the induction and orientation and AusAID brought in people. The AusAID liaison officer was very good. [Story about what they were taught in the induction e.g. not to spit.] They arranged their own housing but the liaison officer told them where to go. There were many students from PNG, mostly nurses and a few accountants. She was the only teacher. There were few Papua New Guineans at Wollongong before her cohort but a PhD student from PNG, who had been her teacher in high school, became a good friend and helped her a lot.	Arriving in Australia; Scholarship experience; Living in Australia; PNG community in Wollongong; Friendship
[00:27:29]	The student accommodation was full so they rented other places. She had a place about ten minutes walk from campus. They all helped each other. Because she was a teacher they asked for her help with writing their	Living in Australia; Family; PNG community in Wollongong; Friendships

	assignments and her husband learnt to type and typed out their assignments, for nothing. In PNG, he was an accountant. In Australia he did the housework, cooked for her and walked her to uni. They all became very close friends and are still good friends now. [Story about taking care of friends' children so the parents could go partying in Sydney and running into one of the children who is grown up now.]	
[00:31:58]	Looking for a house was hard. [Story about getting houses on subsequent trips to Wollongong because she had been a good tenant and the real estate agents remembered her.]	Accommodation in Wollongong
[00:36:44]	She studied information technology in education, which was new for her, and tough because she had to do programming and wasn't good at maths. Her lecturer was supportive and became her first supervisor later. AusAID also paid for tutors if they needed them.	Studying in Australia; Supervisor-student relationship; Scholarship experience
[00:39:07]	She started her PhD with the AusAID scholarship but did two IT education subjects to learn what she needed before starting the PhD. She went back to PNG and worked at PAU for two years. The University of Wollongong offered her a place and PAU supported it, although her family couldn't go. So she went alone for a semester each year from 2002 to 2005. It was hard but she rang them every morning from the public phone. She worked hard and her supervisors were very supportive and approachable.	Studying in Australia; Scholarship experience; Returning to PNG; Family
[00:44:00]	She had Australian friends but couldn't always spend time with them because her schedule was so tight and she was worried about her children at home without her. [Story about sharing an office with a fellow, because there wasn't room in the postgrad room, and how he became an informal supervisor and very good friend, she named her daughter after his wife.]	Friendships; Family in PNG; Studying in Australia
[00:49:07]	Writing up the thesis was a big struggle but her supervisors helped her and she finished on time. Her thesis topic was about using computers as a resource in the classroom. At that time in PNG, computers were in offices, not in classrooms so it was hard to apply her learning. Now most schools have a few computers.	Studying in Australia; Supervisor-student relationship; Returning to PNG
[00:52:48]	There was a huge resource gap when she came home but now there is more access and she teaches her students how to search online for journals. She hasn't been back to Wollongong	Returning to PNG; International mobility; Ongoing connections with Australia; Research

	but does ten or eleven trips a year to go to conferences or take a group for capacity building or to do research. She takes the research team to the research partners, James Cook University, University of Canberra, University of Tasmania and University of New South Wales. Funding has come from ACIAR (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research) and AusAID through the PNG National Aid Council.	collaboration with Australia; Professional networks
[00:55:35]	When she came back she taught for a while and now she is director for research and postgraduate studies. If things turn out, she will be giving the books they made in the project, Women in Horticulture and Small Business, to Julie Bishop in Goroka. The project has been in three provinces but DFAT will extend it to other provinces. PAU has a master's program but not yet a PhD program.	Leadership; Post-scholarship career; Connections with Australia; Professional networks
[00:58:37]	Most students put Lalen as their referee when they apply to study in Australia; one has been accepted at Deakin. Lalen mentors a lot of students. Writing the thesis was hard but the rest of her time in Australia was a joy ride. [Story about living a spartan life in Australia, no fridge or bed, because all that mattered was her studies.]	Leadership; Mentoring; Living in Australia
[01:02:43]	She learned to budget the first time in Australia and the stipend was enough. It's a lonely life, so her friends were important. She let them know how important her studies were to her and they respected that. She advises her students to do that too. Not all of the PNG students did well. The student counselors also helped her lot, she went and talked to them often, not just when she had problems. She advises her students to make use of them too.	Living in Australia; Friendship; PNG community in Wollongong
[01:06:50]	It was hard for her family without her but her husband looked after them. Her eldest daughter is a dentist, and married; the second is doing third year, majoring in English and history; the third daughter is in Grade 4. Lalen's husband works with the Lands Department. She's been to many places in Australia but not Perth. She took a group of students to an AIDS conference in Darwin, then to Thailand. One student became her secretary and another has been employed by Monash to control research in the New Guinea islands.	Family; International mobility; Professional networks; Connections with Australia
[01:10:46]	END	

