

Project Canterbury

Sister Lilian:

Autobiography of Sister Lilian Takua Maeva of Anuta, Solomon Islands, the Community of the Sisters of the Church, and the Church of Melanesia.

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--INTRODUCTION--

Sister Lilian Takua Maeva was a remarkable person. During her short life, she touched thousands of people throughout the Solomons and overseas. She was an important person on her home island and in the Church of Melanesia, as well as one of the most influential women in Solomon Islands history.

I first met Lilian in 1972. I was an anthropology graduate student, conducting fieldwork on Anuta, a Polynesian island in the Solomons' Temotu Province. Lilian was in her mid-20s, modest and quiet, but self-possessed. She was involved in the Companions of the Melanesian Brotherhood and the Anuta Mothers' Union. Other than her obvious commitment to the church, however, she did not seem very different from other young Anutan women. What I failed to observe at the time was her sharp intellect, unshakable courage, a finely honed empathic sense, and profound commitment to a life of service.

In 1977, the senior priest for Temotu Province offered Lilian the opportunity to attend a church training center in the Santa Cruz Islands, and she leapt at the chance. At the time, she had never been away from home and spoke no language other than Anutan--not even Solomon Islands Pidgin English (Pijin). By my calculations she was in her mid- to late twenties, an age at which learning a second language is quite difficult. Yet she persevered, becoming not just fluent but eloquent in Pijin and English. Eventually she joined the Community of the Sisters of the Church (CSC), where her quiet confidence, sense of responsibility, and astute organizational skills soon placed her in a position of leadership. By the time of my third visit to the Solomons in the late 1980s, she was Sister-in-charge for Solomon Islands. She continued to hold leadership positions through the remainder of her life.

Lilian became one of her nation's most widely traveled and admired women. She represented the Church of Melanesia at conferences in North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Great Britain. She moved to a community of the CSC in England, where she spent two years providing pastoral counseling and social services to the poor. Back in the Solomons, she worked to create a shelter in the nation's capital for women who have been mistreated by their partners. At times she placed herself between an abusive husband and his pregnant wife, absorbing physical punishment in order to protect the woman and future child. When fighting broke out in 1999 and 2000 between indigenous people from Guadalcanal (the Isatambu Liberation Front) and the Malaita Eagle Force (MEF), she would

often go to the front lines, positioning herself between the opposing armies in an effort to keep them from shooting at each other.

Through all of this, Lilian remained in contact with her home community and labored to promote Anutan education and development. She hoped to work with the ill, the elderly, and those who were neglected by their families, to try to make their lives more comfortable. She planned to launch a commercial seafood business that might provide funds for community development. She had visions of a local store that would make imported goods available to Anutans in between ships' visits. She was involved in administering the Isadore Feinberg and Rose S. Hartmann Feinberg Memorial Anuta Scholarship Fund, which was initiated in November 2000. And she worked to provide relief to Tikopia and Anuta in the aftermath of Cyclone Zoe in 2003. She was on a mission in connection with the relief effort when she died on Tikopia on June 29, 2003 of complications from diabetes--a recent scourge in much of the Pacific.

Sister Lilian was a true pioneer. Since Nau Ariki, fifteen generations ago, Anutan women have rarely taken public leadership roles. Lilian did so not only on a local, but also on a national and international stage. What follows is an interview that I conducted with Lilian while visiting in Honiara in 2000. I have edited it slightly to eliminate redundancy and improve ease of reading. Otherwise, the words are hers and mine as spoken in September 2000.

Richard Feinberg
Brady Lake, Ohio
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--Interview with Sister Lilian--

LT: You want me talk about my history...? Where do you want me to start?

RF: Well, I thought maybe you could start with your life growing up on Anuta. Talk a little bit about your family life, your experiences as a child, and what that was like. Give us some background for later on when you left the island.

LT: When I was a child, I grew up with my grandparents. I had two sisters in front of me, and I'm the third one in the family. My parents expected a boy. When I was born, they didn't feel happy with me, so my grandparents brought me up.

RF: That was Nuna i Raropita?

LT: That's right.

RF: Your older sisters were Poraukake...?

LT: That's right. And Edith, Nau Penuakimoana.

LT: I was very happy when I was with my grandparents, but when my grandparents died I didn't really feel close to my parents. Sometimes they would beat me. And in 1970, my

mother beat me up one time because I didn't look after my small brother. I had some friends with me, and we were having our meal. My brother was playing, crawling behind us. He was playing, and then he had a toilet accident. My mother was very angry with me, so she beat me up, and I cried. I was about 18 years old. That time you were at Anuta [1972], that time I was having a crisis with my parents. Then a senior priest for Temotu came and asked if I wanted to go to a training center for some training for the church.

RF: Who was that?

LT: Father Ellison Fititei from Makira. At that time he was the senior priest for Temotu. So I said, well... I looked at my brother, David, because I didn't really understand what he was asking me. David asked him to explain, and I said, "Yes, I want to go." So that's how I started off.

RF: The kind of experience that you're describing with your family, does that happen very often on Anuta, where parents beat their children?

LT: Not often. Only some families, especially if they are not happy with a particular child. My parents, for example, were expecting me to be a boy. When I grew up, I always felt out of place. They did love me. But I feel....

RF: You feel almost like you were disappointing them somehow?

LT: That's right; yes. I always felt unhappy with my parents.

RF: When you talk about them beating you, or your mother beating you, was that severe enough to cause real injury?

LT: No, but the pain....

RF: So it was more psychological than physical?

LT: Yeah, that's right.

RF: You said that when you were still living on Anuta you thought that you wanted to do some kind of work for the church?

LT: Yes. I was always interested in church work, especially amongst the old people, the unwanted children, unwanted pregnancies, and the mothers with problems. I've always been working, giving my time to help the poor. I'm not talking about poor like in your country, but poor enough. Especially when they're neglected. That's the kind of work I was doing at home.

RF: Was that with the Mothers' Union?

LT: I joined the Mothers' Union because of my interest in helping. When the Mothers' Union saw me doing this work they encouraged me, and I was admitted as a member. Though I was a young girl, I worked with the Mothers' Union to help young girls with problems, and with the older people. I helped by bringing them whatever they needed. I think that is why the priest, Father Ellison, asked me to go for training. Every time he came,

he saw me working with these people; so he asked me if I wanted to go for training, and I agreed.

RF: Was there was one particular person on Anuta who took an interest in you and thought that you would be a good person to have working for the church?

LT: I think, Mami Tekoro. She was a leader for the Mothers' Union.

RF: She was the sister Te Ariki Tafua [Tikopia's second-ranking chief], wasn't she?

LT: That's right; yes. At that time there were no educated women at home, so they took anybody who was willing to carry out the Mothers' Union work. Later, they appointed me to be a Mothers' Union leader. So I carried on from there until I left home, to come to the training center.

RF: Were the Companions [i.e., the Companions of the Melanesian Brotherhood] all men?

LT: No, they were mixed.

RF: Were you involved with the Companions?

LT: Yes. I was involved with both groups when I was at home: the Companions and Mothers' Union. But my main work was with the women, young girls, and old people.

RF: When did you go to Santa Cruz?

LT: I left home in March 1977.

RF: You had never been off the island before?

LT: No, I had never been away from the island. That was my first trip, and I was on my own, with that priest.

RF: You didn't speak any English? Or any Pijin?

LT: No, I didn't.

RF: Were there any Tikopia you could talk to?

LT: On the trip--on the ship--yes. I came with Pu Teputuu's father and mother, and their daughter, who is my sister-in-law. Nau Ngarumea. But I was on my own with the priest. He treated me as his daughter. But I didn't speak any Pijin, so we didn't communicate with each other.

When I came to the training center, I didn't have very many possessions. All I had were just a few changes of clothes and my bed. I didn't have very much.

When I came to Santa Cruz, the church training center was at Lueseleba secondary school. It was a kind of ... affiliated with the secondary school there.

RF: I thought the secondary school was a provincial school.

LT: That's right; it's a provincial secondary school.

RF: But it also did work for the church?

LT: The secondary school? No, they cannot work together. They are separate. The training center runs its own program. But fortunately, at that time, they had a teacher, a lecturer from Tikopia. A young priest from Tikopia. So I was able to communicate, and he was able to help me. Father Nomleas Sekonga. He was working as a lecturer at the training center. He was able to help me with my English, and even Pijin. I started my education there. I did some at home with Arthur, Pu Nukumairunga; but it wasn't a proper primary school.

RF: He spoke Pijin, but I don't think that he spoke Standard English. I guess I never really talked to him about math, or the other things that one studies in school, so I don't know if he was at all conversant with those subjects.

LT: Now I realize, having gone back and spoken with him in English, that he wasn't as proficient as I'd originally thought. But I didn't say anything to him.

RF: Yeah, I think that he believed he was speaking English, but what he spoke was much closer to Pijin.

LT: That's right, yes.

RF: My namesake, Pu Toke, actually spoke.... [Pu Tokerau was my immediate host. I slept in his house, we shared resources, and he gave me his Anutan name.]

LT: ... much better. Yes.

RF: He was the only one on the island who spoke something close to Standard English when I was first there.

LT: 1977 was my first year at the training center.

RF: Was that very frightening?

LT: It wasn't really frightening, but very hard. I went through a hard time trying to learn. But I think I picked up things fairly quickly. When I learned a new word, I wouldn't forget it. But the training center didn't really help me to speak English. They helped me read some English words but didn't help me understand the meaning. I could read toward the end of the first year at Lueseleba Training Center, but I didn't really understand what I was reading. Then, at the end of 1977 I didn't go home. I came down with a friend of mine—a girl from Tikopia who was doing the same training as I was. So we came down to Makira to the Tikopian settlement there.

RF: At Waimasi?

LT: That's right. We spent our Christmas holiday there. We meant to go back to Santa Cruz, to the Training Center. But when we came up to Pamua Training Center, we found that they

had the same kind of program; and they asked me to stay there. Between them and the staff at Lueseleba Training Center, they fixed something for me so that I stayed at Pamua Training Center to complete my two years there. So I spent one year at Pamua. By the time I ended my year at Pamua, my English had improved, and I could understand the meaning of what I was reading. A little bit, not very much. To make a story flow, I was still a long way off.

RF: What did the students speak among themselves?

LT: Pijin and language. Those who were from the same island...

RF: Were there enough Tikopians there that you could speak language?

LT: At Pamua, fortunately, we had some students from Tikopia. Same thing at Lueseleba Training Center. We had some students from Tikopia there, and I was able to communicate with them. So when I came to Pamua Training Center, there were some students--girls and boys--with whom I was able to make friends. Eventually, I started to make friends with other girls from other islands. I started to speak a little bit of Pijin. I could understand what people said, but not enough to make a conversation. At the end of that year, in November 1978, I received a letter from the Sisters of the Church, asking me if I wanted to join them. It was through the conversation they had with one of the staff from Pamua Training Center. The staff member came and spoke to the Sisters and told them it seemed to him that I was interested in church work. So that's how I came to join the Sisters--through one of the lecturers at the training center. In November 1978, I came to join the Sisters of the Church. I didn't go back home.

RF: That was after you had been away for about two years?

LT: That's right. I was away for two years. Toward the end of those two years, I went to join the Sisters. That was really the foundation of my English, math, and everything. My education started properly with the Sisters. They really helped me. That year, when I came to join the Sisters, they started straight away with the primary level: ABCD, 1 2 3, adding up, spelling, and so forth. So I started like a kid when I joined the Sisters. They taught me, and they kept me from speaking any other language, even Pijin. All the girls who joined the Sisters at that time were forbidden to speak Pijin or Language. We were only allowed to speak English. That really helped me to pick up. At first I would speak English without going through the dictionary to make sure I was using words correctly. Later, the Sisters told me, to use the dictionary. After spending another two years with the Sisters, I could read properly. They told me that I must use the dictionary to help me with the spelling and the meaning of the words. So, I learned to speak English before I could speak proper Pijin. So that's how I learned Pijin and English.

RF: Where did you receive your training with the Sisters?

LT: At the Hill of Prayer.

RF: Where is that?

LT: East of Honiara, at Tenaru, beyond the Roman Catholic Nazareth Apostolic Center. It's beyond that. It's a little hill on its own.

RF: I didn't realize that that was there. When I was here in 1972, before I went to Anuta, I stayed with some people at Tenaru, at the Catholic Center. I didn't realize that there was an Anglican educational center out there as well.

LT: The Sisters of the Church arrived in the Solomon Islands on Christmas Eve, 1970. They stayed at Senapu's hotel, at the Church of Melanesia's headquarters, until they found that place at Tenaru. They started to build in 1972. So you were right; there wasn't any place. They just started the foundation of the place at that time. They opened the place in 1973, and then in 1978 I went to join them. There were twelve of us girls from all over the Solomons, and I was from Anuta. We had five girls from Vanuatu. I learned "proper" English with the Sisters.

RF: Were any Tikopians there?

LT: No.

RF: So you wouldn't have had an opportunity to speak language, even if you wanted to cheat from time to time.

LT: No, not at all. There weren't any Tikopians or Anutans. It wasn't like now, we have girls from Tikopia and Anuta.

RF: How old were you when you left Anuta?

LT: I was 25.

RF: Twenty-five? That's quite old to be starting to learn your second language!

LT: That's what I was told. Some of the Sisters doubted that I would be able to speak and to learn proper English. But, I was really eager to learn. One thing is that when I learn a new word I never forget it. I think that ability helped me--even now, when I learn new things. Some things I may forget, but when I learn a language I remember very well.

RF: You have a real aptitude for language?

LT: I think so. So that's how I learn. Eventually, the Sisters enrolled me in an English course at USP Center.

RF: Here in Honiara?

LT: Here in Honiara. They taught me math, adding up, and then accounting ... how to deal with money ... all when I was with the Sisters. And then in 1984, the Sisters enrolled me at the Honiara Secondary School when they had a class for typists. So I did, and now I am able to do office work--minutes and things like that--for the Sisters here.

RF: And it was the work of the Sisters that interested you from the start?

LT: Yes. But I didn't hear anything about the Sisters' work until toward the end of my second year at Pamua. Before that, I didn't know that there were female communities around in the Solomons.

RF: So at Pamua and Lueseleba, it was both men and women, both boys and girls.

LT: Yes that's right: both boys and girls.

RF: Were you the oldest of the students?

LT: No. There were some students who were much older than myself.

RF: So you didn't feel out of place from that point of view.

LT: No, no. Some of the students were 28 and 29, even up to their thirties. Especially the boys. So I didn't really feel out of place. The only way that I felt out of place was with respect to my knowledge.

RF: You felt that they all had a head start on you?

LT: Yes, that's right. Some of them were highly educated boys and girls. Secondary: Form Five and Form Six.

RF: That must have been intimidating. I know that the Church tries to avoid feelings of competition, but there's still some sense in which you're competing with the other students.

LT: Yes, I felt that when I was at the training center.

RF: You didn't feel that so much with the Sisters?

LT: No, funny enough. I think because there is a difference in how they teach. The Sisters didn't make me feel out of place. I felt more like they were helping me get started. I found with the European Sisters--at that time we had Sisters from the UK, Canada, and Australia--that their aim was to help the girls and the women in the Solomon Islands to come up. To educate them in whatever they knew, especially in Christian knowledge and belief. That kind of thing. So, I felt that the Sisters helped me a lot to become the kind of person that I am now, and to gain the knowledge that I have.

RF: When did you actually join the Sisters?

LT: It was in 1979 when I was admitted to the first step, which they call postulants. I was admitted as a postulant of the community in 1979.

RF: A postulant?

LT: Postulant ... p-o-s-t-u-l-a-n-t.... It's a learner. That's where I began my life in the community.

RF: Would you like to talk a little bit about your experience with the Sisters?

LT: Yes, starting from the beginning, when I was a young girl, I was always interested in poor people. You know, helping those who are disadvantaged. So when I was with the Sisters and completed my training, I came to stay at Patteson House. That was in 1983. I joined them in 1978, and I completed my training in 1983. And I came down to work with

the Sisters at Patteson house in Honiara. The Sisters there were working amongst the women and the young people. I was especially interested in helping the women and children. The battered women and the girls with unexpected pregnancies who had been violently driven out from home. That kind of thing. I started to get interested in that work. I've been working with the women and children ever since.

RF: Since 1983?

LT: Yes. Sometimes I did pastoral work, visiting hospitals, prisons, and going out to villages.

RF: When you say doing pastoral work, you're talking about counseling people and leading them in prayer?

LT: Yes. Leading them with prayer and Bible studies. That kind of work. Going around the villages with other Sisters. Taking our religious instructions to schools, and so on. Then, 1984 was my first experience traveling overseas. I went to a Chapter meeting in Melbourne, Australia. And in 1986 I went to another Chapter meeting in Canada, near Toronto. I spent one month with the Sisters there. And then from there I went to have one week with a friend of mine in British Columbia. On my way to Canada, I spent two weeks with the Sisters at Saint Christopher's home in Fiji, to experience the Sisters' work amongst the women and children there. In 1990, I went back to Australia for one year, and I did some counseling training.

RF: Was that also in Melbourne?

LT: No. In Macquarie in New South Wales--in one of the private hospitals there. I did grief counseling and marriage counseling. I did a counseling course. And, while there, I also worked part time with the women's refuge, run by the Sisters of Mercy. When I came back to the Solomons, I became involved in training of the young Sisters--novices. But also, I continued to help mothers and children, until 1996, when I went to New Zealand for one month. I came back, and then, in May I went to England for two years. When I was in England, I did a course in pastoral counseling, with a spiritual direction course.

RF: And that was at a university there? Or with a church?

LT: It was in the church—in Wales Cathedral. I did pastoral counseling there. Then, toward the end of the year, I enrolled to continue pastoral training at Trinity College in Bristol. I only did one term there; then I had to come back. While in Bristol, I gave out food parcels and fed people on the street who came to our door every day. We started a program there. Sister Anna Lisa and I were working to give out food parcels to women and men who live on the streets, or "squats." Twice a week we gave out food and drink to people on the streets. And then, apart from that, I also worked with the Salvation Army for mothers and children. I really enjoyed my time in England, and I learned a lot from that. When I came back, I asked the Sisters to come to Honiara and try to continue that work with women and children. That is what I'm doing now.

RF: Could you talk a little bit about the kinds of program that the Sisters have been running with battered women, with children who are in need, with the poor. What kinds of service do you provide, and how do you get the services to the people?

LT: In Honiara, we have a house called Patteson House. It's a two story building. Upstairs we have six rooms, and that's where the Sisters are living. Downstairs are another six rooms. Among the downstairs rooms, we have an office and a counseling room where we see women and girls with problems. Sometimes we see a husband and wife. We also provide four rooms for women and girls and children with problems--especially problems involving violence, when they need to be away from their husbands. We provide counseling, especially spiritual counseling. We sometimes try to provide care for women and girls who felt the need to run away. They come with what they're wearing and nothing else. We have to provide clothing, food, and accommodation.

RF: You provide that at Patteson House?

LT: We provide that at Patteson House. We try to provide a comfortable environment for them. But a noisy and crowded area like Patteson House is not a suitable place for that kind of work. Sometimes when we deal with a problem, we have started to bring in the husband. We counsel the woman, and then we see the husband--separately at first.

RF: Are husbands usually agreeable to that kind of work?

LT: Some. Some do not like it. So sometimes we ask the Brothers to come in and deal with the husband. When that happens, if the husband and wife agree, we put them together to talk about their problems. Sometimes we bring in the whole family after counseling the couple. If the problem involves the children, then we also bring in the children to sit down together as a family and discuss, look at the problem, and try to find a way to move from where the problem is to a more comfortable, happier place. We're trying to help the women, their husbands, and the whole family to see that they can make a journey from the pain into a more comfortable and happier place.

RF: Do you feel that you've had some success? Has it been a rewarding experience?

LT: Dealing with these violent situations is sometimes very frustrating; but it can also be rewarding, because you can see the reconciliation--the coming together--of the family. Sometimes you have to accept the fact that they do not want to be together any more. They want a separation. This happens a lot too. I've also had experiences with young girls who have run away from home. There are many reasons why girls run away. So yes, I've had success and joy in seeing families come together; and I also have to bear the sadness of seeing the separations. But I have to accept, that it is their choice; their decision.

RF: Have you ever been threatened or felt frightened because of your work in family counseling and helping battered women?

LT: Yes, I have. Not really frightened, but I have experienced being threatened when trying to protect women from angry husbands. For example, one time a very young couple from Western Province came to Honiara for the wife to have a baby. They had a very severe row. They fought, and the husband beat the wife up and tore her clothes. They happened to come around to Patteson house, and I heard the woman screaming. The woman's clothes had been torn by the husband. She was bruised everywhere, especially the face. She was expecting to have her baby soon. So, I ran between the couple, and I threw my arms around the woman and turned my back to the man, and he kicked me in the back. He kept on kicking me and hitting me on my back and on the back of my head, until he saw a piece of white cloth at my back. It was my veil. Then he realized that it wasn't his wife that he was kicking and

beating; it was me. Then he said, "Who is this?" I said, "Me, Sister Lilian."

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm trying to protect your wife. I'm trying to help your wife."

He said, "Well, get out of there, you're interfering. This is *my* wife."

I answered, "Well, it's true; she is your wife. But your wife is bleeding. She's bleeding to death, so I'm trying to support and protect her."

Then he calmed down. I tried to help them, so eventually he calmed down. He said, "Oh, thank you Sister. You know the anger made me blind, and drove me to beat my wife; and I'm really sorry for that."

I said, "Have you had anything at all to eat?"

"No, we've been fighting all day."

It was half past seven in the evening. I said, "Let's go in and look for something for you to eat." So they came, and we sat down. We gave them tea and food.

After eating I said, "So, tell me your problem. Why did you beat up your wife?"

He said, "I think it's better for my wife to start the story first." I think he realized what he did.

The wife started to tell me her story, and then the husband added his perspective. After they told me their stories, what happened and how they started, I told them, "Sometimes little things can turn into very big problems. If you don't look at the problem together and discuss it together, it can erupt and spoil your life."

We had a prayer together, and they went off. After five days they came back with money. It was her husband saying that I must give the money "to Sister" as a kind of compensation. I said, "No, you cannot buy this work. If you like, you can donate it--make a donation to this work. But I cannot ask for compensation from you."

"OK. Accept it then as a donation from me." So, I accepted it from him.

I have been through other violent situations. It doesn't really frighten me. I and other Sisters certainly have been threatened. But it is also a joy for me, when I find that in the end, we are able to help.

RF: Yes, that story was very gratifying because you did bring the two together, and they both appreciated what you did. It sounds like they understood and appreciated each other after your intervention. That must be the kind of thing that keeps you going.

LT: Yes, that's the kind of thing that encourages me to continue on. Other areas, other experiences have discouraged me. But the joy for me, what encourages me, is when one or two souls, two families, are united. That really keeps me going in this work.

RF: It must be very gratifying to know that you've been responsible for bringing people back together under those circumstances. Do people have to come to you and find you, or is there some program that the Sisters have to reach out to people who need help?

LT: We do have a program to reach out to people. We talk about the kind of work that we do, and often people come to us for help. But now I have a proposal to build a separate place where this kind of work can operate with greater security. By then we will be able to plan out a program to reach out more. I have been busy with this program ... with proposals for a new women's refuge. It is important because in the Solomons we do not have any refuge at all, except in Patteson House, where women in violent situations can go to get help.

RF: That is something that I was going to ask about. One of the things that the battered women's protection movement in the United States has tried to do is establish safe houses. Places where women can go if they feel that they need to get away from their husbands to be physically safe. A lot of effort has been put into keeping those locations secret so that the husbands can't find them. There are even cases where a violent husband may get a gun and come around to try to shoot his wife. So they found that it's very important to have a place where the women can go where they know that their husbands can't find them and they can be safe. I guess there's nothing like that yet in the Solomons?

LT: No, no. There are places where women can go for counseling, but they don't provide shelter, except Patteson House. I'm working on proposals for the refuge, to build a separate place from where the Sisters live--to build a shelter where women can come for a few days.

RF: How many women do you have staying with you right now?

LT: One just arrived last night: a girl with a five-month pregnancy. She ran away because of violence in the home. In an effort to get away, she was staying with another boy from this island. We have one family: a woman with three children--one big girl and two boys. Small boys. We also have a girl who has been unhappy living with her parents. I think we have about ten, a small number.

RF: That's quite a few.

LT: Yes. And it can be very crowded sometimes, because it's the only place.

RF: The Catholics don't have anything like that?

LT: No, I don't think so.

RF: And the other churches? The SSEC and the SDAs?

LT: From what I heard, they provide counseling but not shelters. We have about ten living with us at the moment, but sometimes it can be up to about 20 women: four in each room.

RF: Now, that number includes the women and their children?

LT: And their children. It is difficult when we have women and their children, because there is no other place where we can talk to them.

RF: Do have any requirement that they have to be members of the Anglican Church?

LT: No, no. Sometimes people say they want the Sisters just to deal with Anglicans. And I said, "No, we are looking at *human* need. We are not looking at Anglicans. Our priority is the needs of the women and the children." You know, whenever a woman, whether she is a Christian or not, whether she is an Anglican or not, is in a violent situation, this service, our service is for that kind of need. We don't care whether she's an Anglican, or whether she's a Christian, or not. We try to offer similar help to everyone. That's what we are trying to do.

RF: You've been the prime mover in this? You've been the main person responsible for the program to protect battered women and children and provide counseling?

LT: Yes, at the moment. The European Sisters have been doing some of this work, but not very much. We have more Sisters working on that now. Earlier, we had Sister Doreen who is now in U.K.

RF: Where?

LT: She's in U.K. at the moment. Sister Doreen from Makira. She's also had the same interest.

RF: Sister Doreen?

LT: Sister Doreen. She's been working with me, but at the moment I'm the only one carrying out the plan.

RF: What's the relationship between the Sisters and the Brotherhood?

LT: The Brotherhood?

RF: Yes, the Brothers of the Church of Melanesia.

LT: There are areas we work together. I've been talking about the Sisters' project to build a proper center for battered women and their children. In addition, I'm now trying to create a network with the Mothers' Union and other religious communities—with the Sisters of Melanesia, the Melanesian Brothers, and the Franciscan Brothers. Each of these three communities has a representative on the committee for this project. The initiators were the Sisters of the Church, but I'm trying to involve them so that we can work together.

RF: Have you found them to be receptive? Cooperative?

LT: Yeah, but they really depend on the planning that is done by the Sisters of the Church.

RF: So you have to provide the leadership; and then with your leadership, they'll provide some logistical support?

LT: Now we have a proper committee. We have a chairman, who is the former Archbishop of the Church of Melanesia, Bishop Norman Palmer. You have met him?

RF: I don't think that I ever met him but Pu Teuku talks about him. [Pu Teukumarae, also

known as Frank Kataina, is the younger brother of Anuta's senior chief. He has, for many years, been a leader of the Anutan community in Honiara.)

LT: He is a retired Archbishop. Then, Father David is vice chairman of this board. He is the secretary for the Melanesian Board of Missions.

RF: Bishop Norman is still in the Solomons?

LT: Yes. He's the chairman of this board. Before that the Sisters worked directly with other members of the community. Now we have a committee, which serves as a body to deal with the community. The Melanesian Brothers and the SSF have representatives on this working committee. We are working more closely at the moment, but we have different rules and make up different communities of course.

RF: You're "Head Sister" in the Solomons?

LT: No. Sister Phyllis is the coordinator for the community in the Solomons.

RF: I see. Where is she from?

LT: She's from Makira. Until next year, when we are going to have an election for a new "Provincial," when the Sisters in the Solomons will become a Province of their own. At the moment, we are under Australian Province. We call ourselves Australian-Pacific Province.

RF: Province?

LT: That is the community term. Next year we are going to elect our own Provincial. Sister Phyllis is the coordinator for the time being until we have a Provincial.

RF: But I've heard you referred to as the Head Sister.

LT: Just for Patteson House. We don't use the word "Head Sister." We use the term "Sister-in-Charge." So I am Sister-in-Charge of Patteson House and the work there. But Sister Phyllis is an overall leader.

RF: How long have you been the Sister-in-Charge of Patteson House, and how did you get to be in that position?

LT: I was elected by the Solomon Islands Chapter to be in charge of Patteson House. I've been in charge of Patteson House since the end of '98. Two years. Since shortly after I came back from UK.

RF: When I was here before, I think in '88 or '93, people referred to you as the Head Sister.

LT: I was then.

RF: I see, so you've done this a couple of times.

LT: Yes, it's not something new to me.

RF: What were your responsibilities as Head Sister.

LT: I wasn't really a Head Sister. European Sisters took responsibility from 1970 to 1986. From 1970 to '86 the European Sisters were in the leadership in the Solomon Islands. From 1986 through 1993, I was in charge of the Sisters in the Solomons, especially with respect to training.

RF: Training?

LT: Yes; the training of Sisters. So they referred to me as the Head Sister. But I wasn't really the head, because I was working with the Provincial, which stays in Australia.

RF: In other words, Head Sister was not your official title; it's what people called you informally.

LT: Yes, informally. It wasn't my title.

RF: But you were responsible for the training of new Sisters.

LT: Yes. I was really assisting the work of the Provincial Sister who stays in Australia and comes every year. I assisted her in running their program and ... attending to the spiritual life of the Sisters.

RF: Does that require you to travel around to different provinces, or do you do most of your work here?

LT: I do most of my work here, but at that time we had only have one house at Malaita, and we had one other house.

RF: There was no house in Makira or Santa Cruz or Western Province?

LT: Not until 1994. In '94 I went to open another house in Makira, at the invitation of the Bishop of the Diocese of Hanuato'o. I went to start the house there with some other Sisters. Then, another time, I went to Temotu at the invitation of the Temotu Bishop. My job was to help establish the House and figure out how many Sisters could live there. Then I came back again to do the novitiate training. I was kind of doing the role of the Head Sister. I think that's why people gave me that name. But I really was carrying out the work of the Provincial.

RF: Are you still doing that kind of coordination?

LT: Now Phyllis is coordinating the work of the different houses in the Solomons. I think that's because I'm concentrating on the woman's shelter project at the moment. That's what I'm busy doing: writing proposals and making plans for a new building, to serve as a woman's refuge.

RF: During all of this time that you've been in Santa Cruz, and Makira, here in Honiara, Australia, England, have you been able to stay in contact with people at home? You've been back a few times?

LT: Yeah. I've been back for holidays to see the people at home. Although I'm helping the people in different parts of the Solomon Islands, I also know about the needs of my own people back at Anuta. Every time I go home, they ask me to help them. They want me to go home, stay there, and work on Anuta. Apart from helping them in their spiritual life, I also see the physical need. There is no other development at Anuta. They've been struggling to start a fishing business for a long time—nearly ten years, I guess. But nothing has happened. So I thought that's another area where I can help. So I'm doing two projects at the moment: one on Anuta, and one for the Community, for the women's refuge. I feel that that is also helpful for my people on Anuta. Often, people from Anuta tell me that I'm trying to help other people, but not them. Then I feel that...

RF: Do you feel that it's a fair criticism, or is it that they don't understand what you've been doing?

LT: I don't really know. Maybe for them it's a fair criticism. They might need those of us who have joined the Sisters to try and help. This is something I'm looking at. I'm looking at the fishing business in Anuta. You know; fish are everywhere. I'm making a proposal for the fishing project that they've been attempting for a long time. I've spoken to Frank Pu Teuku about it, and Pu Ngarumea. Once I complete this project and I have something, then I can go back more and talk to Pu Teuku about it.

RF: Who are you planning to submit the proposal to?

LT: At the moment I spoke to the member from Temotu Pele.

RF: That would be Michael Maina?

LT: Michael Maina.

RF: He told me that he was working with you on something, but he didn't give me any details.

LT: Yes, because I was trying to get to speak to the member from VATUD.

RF: Hudson?

LT: Yeah, Hudson. But I can't find him during this war; during the hard time of the people here in Honiara. He is staying on Tikopia. I went to see Michael Maina about something altogether different. But then, in the conversation I mentioned the fishing project, and he took an interest in helping me.

RF: He told me as well that he's very interested in doing something to try to help Anuta. He recognizes that Anuta has been very isolated and under-serviced for a long time. He told me that he's interested in trying to do what he can to promote development on Anuta.

LT: I spoke to the Anuta people at White River a few years ago, and told them, "This is my dream. This is how I feel I can help you. You have something there that you can start. You have it, but it will take somebody to help you." I've told them, "I cannot hold the fund for you." And they all said, "Well, no. We have tried, but we've failed because we have raised funds and then the funds disappeared. Now we want you to look after the fund." So I said,

"Okay." I'm thinking of making a proper committee. When I go for Christmas holiday, I want to speak to the chiefs and the *maru*, and find out what they think about it. [*Maru* are the men of the two chiefly 'clans'. They act as advisors to and executive officers of the chiefs.]

RF: It seems you should be talking with Pu Teuku. He feels he has a lot of the pieces in place, and that things are ready to go as soon as he gets a little more cooperation from the people at home. I don't know if things are really as well set as he says, but he seems fairly well convinced that everything's just about operational. All he needs is for people to be sufficiently confident to participate in the project. The situation you describe--where people have worked on things and given their time, effort, and money, and nothing has happened--makes them skeptical. They want to see some results before they invest more of their energy. But unless they invest their energy, there aren't going to be any results.

LT: Yes, I think that's what they told me. That's what I'm working on.

RF: Do you find, when you speak to people from Anuta, that you're listened to and taken seriously? That your opinion is respected?

LT: When I go home I take an interest in the people there. When I go to an area, I take an interest in the people of that area. And I think that they respect me when I say something.

RF: The men as well as the women respect you and your opinions?

LT: Yeah.

RF: Has it been a problem that you're a woman or that you're from *nga pakaaropa* [i.e., *pakaaropa* are 'commoners' or members of the two non-chiefly 'clans']?

LT: No, not at all. Because when I take an interest in matters on Anuta, I look at them from all sides. I consult with the chiefs and the *maru*, and those are the people that I work with. I'm trying to work on their behalf, because they can't do it by themselves. So I said to myself, "What about if I help Pu Teuku to raise up? He might try his way, I might try my way, and then in the end, this will come together." That's how I see it. This will come together. Because if I go in fully to Pu Teuku, I might disturb his ideas.

RF: The one thing to be careful of, I think, is to make sure that you don't work at cross-purposes. You don't want to get in each other's way, and neither of you wants to do anything that will distract or detract from what the other is doing.

LT: Yes, that is what I believe as well.

RF: So you might not be exactly working together, but you need to coordinate with each other.

LT: That's right. The way I look at it. I must be careful not to discourage what Pu Teuku is doing. What the two of us are doing, in the end, will come together as one. What I'm trying to do should help him accomplish his goals. I was planning to speak to him about buying some things to take home, because I had a letter from home. They asked me to buy a few things to take home. Then they will sell those things, and I will bring the money back and

reinvest it.

RF: Who would this be for? Who sent you the letter?

LT: My nephew. My nephew is the grandchild of Pu Teuku, because my sister-in-law comes from Nau Paone. Her mother is Nau Paone, the chief's sister.

RF: So the letter came from your nephew?

LT: From my nephew. He was writing on behalf of Pakapuu and Pu Taumarei, and the Ariki Koroatu. My nephew is well educated, so he was writing on their behalf.

RF: Which nephew is this?

LT: Lazarus Keve.

RF: I don't think I know him.

LT: You know my brother Pu Pita? David Pu Pita?

RF: Yeah.

LT: His firstborn son. So my brother's wife is Pu Taumarei's sister.

RF: That would be Tanakimaru?

LT: No. Leah.

LT: So that is my plan. But I'm going to discuss all this with Pu Teuku and take this letter to him.

RF: So the idea is not that this would be a project for one family, but that it would involve the whole community in some way?

LT: Yes, that's what I hope. Because, the way I see it, we mustn't wait for the help of other people. We must start from scratch. We must start ourselves. I shared my ideas with the two chiefs at home before I came. I said I'm going to start. I'm not going to make you work hard; I'm going to work hard on your behalf. That's what I'm going to share with Pu Teuku. I've been working, and now I have a little money to start. So I'm going to tell him that I'd like to get started rather than waiting, waiting, waiting...

RF: So the idea is to get some kind of community store going?

LT: Yeah.

RF: And then, you'll provide some seed money and, after that, hope that it will become self-sustaining?

LT: That's how I see it. It has worked in some projects--small projects for women and children and that sort of thing. And I've done the same thing to support the project at home.

RF: Do you know Mr. Low? Did you ever meet him?

LT: The name sounds familiar to me. Maybe when I was very small....

RF: He's somebody whom Pu Teuku met, I think just a few years ago. Frank says that he's part Australian, and maybe part Singapore or part Malaysian. He has a good deal of money and he's been interested in helping the Anutans to help develop a fishing business. He's agreed to work as their agent in Australia and market the marine products that they send to him. I gather that some of the people living in White River have met him. Most of the people have not met him but they've heard about him; and your brother, Pu Aramera, said he has seen a letter from him.

LT: I think I've read the letter from him to Frank. I've heard of him from Frank, I think, but I've never met him. In any case, I don't think we should wait for a big sum of money. I always start from scratch. I believe in starting myself. Then other people might get interested. Support will come, but I have to start myself.

RF: I think you're right in your approach. Frank believes Mr. Low has committed himself to provide money and support, and all he needs is to see some responsiveness from the people at home. I've never met Mr. Low and don't know if he's reliable, or if he has some personal agenda. But Frank seems to trust him and feels he has the people's interest at heart.

Another thing that I've been curious about: you talk about people who are poor and neglected on Anuta. But one of the things that struck me when I was there in 1972 and '73 is that people are *not* poor and neglected, at least in the way that they are in Europe, the United States, or Latin America. I wasn't aware of anybody who would be allowed to go hungry, for example. People really seemed to embrace the idea of *aropa* [this is the Anutan version of a widespread Polynesian word meaning 'love', 'empathy', or 'compassion'], which means mutual support, making sure that the hungry have enough to eat, making sure that everybody is treated as family. Is my view is naïve? Did I miss something that was going on? Is there more non-caring and oppression on Anuta than I have been aware of?

LT: No. The kind of poor I'm talking about is not the kind of poor that you experience, or I experienced in your country; in European countries; in London....

RF: Where people are out on the streets who don't have....

LT: Yeah. Not that kind. I'm not talking about that kind of poor. The kind of poor that I'm talking about, their mentality is not functioning the way we think that it should be. That kind of poor. Sometimes they cannot think straight for themselves.

The other kind I'm talking about includes old people, and maybe some girls who have problems. Not poor in the sense that they don't have food or care. I'm looking at a different kind of poor. For example, people who lack knowledge other people have. Perhaps I have the knowledge and can help them. I'm not looking at only the physical needs of the person. Anuta may not exactly have poor people, but they do have people who are not functioning well mentally. Or sometimes with old people, their families are busy with their gardens, gardens, gardens. They wake up in the morning, go to prayer, eat out in the bush, and don't pay adequate attention to the elders.

RF: So they're at home alone all day?

LT: They're on their own all day. Some of them cannot get water for themselves, or....

RF: So it's not that people are purposely treating them poorly, but they have other things to think about?

LT: That's right. It's more that they're kind of neglected.

RF: They become an afterthought?

LT: Yes, that's right. That's the kind of thing that I'm talking about. At home, you hardly see anybody really poor. But if you look closely at the people, they will be sitting all day, going nowhere. People in that situation range from maybe a person with a little bit of physical disability to old people, or maybe those with a little bit of mental disability. Their relatives may turn their attention to work and are busy the whole day. And they will be left all alone. They need someone to attend to their needs. For example, some old people there. Paapae Kirei. Paapae Pareatai. [*Paapae* is a term of address for one's mother, either biological or classificatory. Therefore, Paapae Kirei means something like "Mommy Kirei".] You know; those old people.

RF: That's a good point. It seems basic and obvious, but someone who is old and sick and can't get around: how do people like that take care of their toilet? Do they just go in the house, and somebody cleans up the mess?

LT: In my experience, yes. The two times I've gone home since returning from the UK, I started up with a few girls, and they seem to like the things I do for old people: to clean up their toilet, because they cannot get to where the younger people go; to bring water and bathe them; and attend to their basic needs. For example, think of Pu Nukumairunga. He needs help. [Pu Nukumairunga, an immigrant from Tikopia, was crippled with polio but was, nevertheless, an active, productive member of the community in 1972-73.]

RF: He's not still alive is he?

LT: He's still alive.

RF: I thought I'd heard that he died.

LT: I heard that too. I heard, when I was in England, that he died. In fact, he's very well and still walking around with crutches.

So, I'm just talking about basic needs. The kind of need that people on Anuta sometimes forget: that these are needy people. They need someone. Sometimes grandchildren are told to take care of them; but you know what children are like.... When the adults go to the garden, the children go and play and forget about their responsibilities.

RF: So what's really needed is a way to remind people to think about the needs of some of the disabled, some of the elderly ... people you care about but might not always think about?

LT: Yes. Exactly.

RF: I guess there's one more piece to this picture that I'm kind of interested in. Right now, while the war is going on. The war on Guadalcanal. [This "war" is what Solomon Islanders call "The Tension" or "The Ethnic Tension," between paramilitary militias representing Malaita and indigenous people of Guadalcanal.] How has that affected you and your activities, and what have you been doing in relation to the fighting?

LT: My interest has always been on humanitarian issues. When I am in a violent situation, it doesn't frighten me. I just go into it. Since the war on Guadalcanal started up so violently toward the end of last year, the situation has been unbelievably terrible. I wanted to go out there and be amongst the soldiers. But the Melanesian Brotherhood has taken on this ministry, to go out amongst the militants and try to help them. So I went to the Archbishop and told him what I've been feeling; the feeling I've been fighting against. I said, "I know I'm a woman. And I know my area in Solomon Island Pastoral. I shouldn't be out there on the front lines during a war, but I really feel that I have a call to help. So I want to go with the Melanesian Brothers."

He said, "Daughter, I don't want you and the Sisters to go to the front. It will be an embarrassment for me and the Church if any Sister were wounded or died. It's OK for men, because that's men's thing. But for the women, according to Solomon Island custom, we don't allow women to take part in such things."

I said, "OK; but I feel that I would like to go. I also feel that I have a commitment. I made a vow as a member of the Community. This is included in my vow to help people." And he said, "Well, maybe you can provide transport service." So I helped by transporting the Brothers and food, and transporting wounded people back to the hospital. But then I got involved more heavily. So I came back to see the Archbishop again. And Father David.

RF: Who is the Archbishop now?

LT: Ellison Pogo. I went and spoke to the secretary of the Melanesian Board of Missions first. I said, "I've been speaking to the Archbishop. But the more violent the fighting has gotten, the more uncomfortable I feel." By then I was in tears. I said, "I really want to join the Brothers." Father David said, "I think I can see that."

I said, "I don't care about myself. All I care is for is the suffering of others. I want to help out in whatever way I can. I want to be there to share with them ... what the Brothers are going through." I continued, "I'm not asking to go and spend the night there. Let me just go in the daytime--to be with the Brothers and help the militants and wounded soldiers." Then I went back again to the Archbishop. He said, "Be careful then." So during the heavy shooting I just walked right into it.

RF: That's how you were being careful?

LT: The Brothers and Sisters we divided up equally, and we went out and stopped the shooting. So I was heavily involved. But when the Brothers said, "Don't go," I would just stay. I was working with two Sisters from the Sisters of Melanesia and two Sisters from my own community, so there were five of us with the Melanesian Brothers.

RF: What have you actually done on the front lines? What kind of work have you been able to do there?

LT: We've been ... I've been trying ... with the Brothers to go up and stop the shooting.

RF: You stop the shooting? How?

LT: When they start to shoot, we try to stop them.

RF: How do you do that?

LT: We just go up.

RF: And you talk to them?

LT: Yes. We talk to them gently and try to help them see what they are doing to themselves. Myself, I did a lot of spiritual counseling with them. I tried to help them see that that's not the way to deal with a crisis between two islands or two peoples. I tried to help them to see that the gun is not the answer. You can only kill your brothers and sisters. I did a lot of counseling and made them talk.

RF: What kind of reception do you get when you do that?

LT: We have a program where we have prayer time twice a day with them--in the morning and in the evening. Before the prayer time, we are supposed to give a bit of talk: taking a Bible passage and relating it to their situation. But also, we sometimes come to the camps to visit the militants. On those occasions, we Sisters sometimes go on our own. We try to hold a normal conversation and not force them to talk. Sometimes they want us to listen. They want us to sit down and listen to their complaints and frustrations. Those are the times I get a chance to come in.

RF: So it's not as if you go up to somebody who's got a rifle on his shoulder, and he's aiming it, and somebody else is shooting at him, and you tap him on the shoulder and say, "Just a minute, maybe you shouldn't be shooting."

LT: No, no. We have to be careful where we come in. We look for the chance.

RF: Do you find that the militants are happy to have you there, or do they feel like you are intruding and wish that you would go away?

LT: Some of them. Some of them do feel, yes.

RF: Do some of them threaten you and try to make you go away?

LT: No. A few of them do not want us to be there because of Solomon Island custom. Women are not allowed at the front lines of war. It's not really threatening. Rather, it reflects the kind of respect they have for women in a war situation.

RF: And that's true on both sides.

LT: Yes. But what I found with the Melanesian Brothers is that they are happy to have the Sisters helping them, because some of them are very young and very frightened of gun shots. Some of us Sisters are more mature than some of the young Brothers. I work very happily with the Melanesian Brothers, especially with the older members of the group. During heavy shooting, some of the young Brothers were scared of the guns--the noise of the gunshots.

RF: Have any of them been injured yet?

LT: No. No. Miraculous things have happened during this mission. For example, during heavy shooting when we divided up. Some were sent to the Isatambu. Others were told to go to the MEF.

RF: And you're able to get through the checkpoints?

LT: Yes. The Isatambu camp is on the east side of the bridge, and west side of the bridge is the MEF. And our camp is right in the middle. So when they fire across, we are right in the middle.

RF: And still, nobody has been injured?

LT: No. It is amazing! We almost don't believe it ourselves, because our camp is right in the middle. Our camp is not very far from the bridge. Between the airport and our camp is the militant camp, Malaita Eagle.

RF: So you're on the town side of the bridge.

LT: Yes. Our camp was on the town side of the bridge. I have been involved since May. I joined with the Brothers in May, June, July. Those heavy months of shooting. I was there with the other four Sisters. Then, toward the end of July, the Sisters withdrew. I told the Sisters, "We should withdraw. It's getting better so, we'll withdraw and let the Brothers continue with the work."

RF: Has it really been better since the end of July?

LT: It's getting better. There are still a few gunshots every now and then, but not as bad as it was.

RF: I guess what I've been hearing about mostly since I've been here is not so much the gunshots on the front lines, but the looting in town.

LT: Exactly.

RF: That seems to be what people are really afraid of.

LT: Yeah, yeah. And stealing. People just walk up to other people's homes, point guns at them, and say, "Give me that vehicle or else." So people have to watch their property being taken away from them.

RF: And there's no one they can call to help.

LT: No, no. Nobody can help. People are frightened because others have guns. Others take their possessions and chase the people away from their homes. They take their property and burn down the buildings. That is what has been happening since July. It's not so much a matter of the militias fighting each other; this is happening more in Honiara.

RF: The Anglican Church still doesn't ordain women as priests? Does it?

LT: No. They don't.

RF: Have you ever found yourself resentful about that, thinking that you wish that you could become a priest? Or are you satisfied and fulfilled with the career that you have chosen.

LT: I am satisfied with my ministry. But there are places, like Anuta, that have no priest. And I think, well, if the Church had agreed for women to be ... I would be one. At times when a priest is needed right away but none is available, I think of becoming a priest. Otherwise I'm satisfied.

RF: As a Sister of the Church, do you take a vow of poverty?

LT: Yes. I have taken a vow of poverty and chastity.

RF: That doesn't keep you from driving vehicles? It just keeps you from owning a vehicle?

LT: Um, no. The point is that I have no individual property. Everything I have belongs to the whole group.

RF: By the whole group, that would mean the Church? Or the Sisters?

LT: The Community. The Sisters. For example, the clothing I'm wearing is a Community habit. The Community could give these clothes to me as part of my dedication. They are symbolic of my dedication to this particular work. But such things as a vehicle that I might use, is Community property. Myself, I don't own anything. If I need something, I ask the Community.

RF: What about the money that you've been investing with the thought that you're going to use it for Community development on Anuta? That's not property of the Sisters; that's money that you control?

LT: The money that I control is not mine, and it is not the Community's property. What I'm doing is just helping. It's not really affecting my vow of poverty. It is my support to the community's project at home. The people have been struggling for quite a few years now. And I believe that this is the area where I can help. But because of the nature of my ministry, I cannot be at home all the time.

RF: So, it's money that you may control, but it's not money that you use for any personal purposes.

LT: That's right. I don't use that money for any personal purpose of mine; it's the people's money. When the project takes off, then I'll hand it over to them. That's what I'm doing. I'm

not going to hold this for a long time.

RF: And the Community of Sisters provides for your food and medical care if you need that?

LT: Yes. My basic needs are provided for by the Community. If I need money to travel somewhere, or to meet some need, it is the community that provides it. If I'm given some money by a personal friend of mine or family, I hand that money into the Community fund, and it will be used by everybody. If I need money for my personal needs, I'll ask the Community to give it to me. The exception would be if I really need it at that time; then I'll use a small amount of money from friend. Later, when I go home to the Community, I explain to them, "I was given ten dollars--or five dollars--because I was really thirsty, or hungry, and I bought refreshment for myself." But my basic needs, my personal needs, are always met by the Community.

RF: There's a side question that I am curious about. It doesn't really have to do directly with you, but I've heard stories from several people about the Cross in the Church on Anuta turning itself around during services. Have you heard about that?

LT: I am one of the eyewitnesses.

RF: You saw it?

LT: I saw it during a service. That was before I joined the Community.

RF: What do you make of it? You actually saw it happen? There wasn't anybody manipulating it? There wasn't any wind?

LT: No; it was during the service at St. John. The Catechist didn't see it.

RF: That was when Pu Toke was still Catechist?

LT: Yes.

RF: And he was standing in front, with his back to the cross?

LT: No; he was standing off, because he was conducting the service from the left side of the church. If you are facing the front of church, it was on your left, in front. The rows of women and girls are in front. Pu Toke was conducting the service from in front where the Catechist normally stands. He was conducting the service from there when the cross turned around. I was in the first row of the girls. We were in the front row, looking straight at the altar; so quite a few of us witnessed the cross slowly turning around. I thought something was wrong with my eyes. So I rubbed my eyes, and then I looked again. The cross was turning sideways. It was facing Pu Toke. Then, the side was toward him. Once more I thought something was wrong with my eyes, so I rubbed them again and looked. Now the cross was half way, turning its back to the people. I couldn't make sense of why it was turning around.

RF: Do you have any explanation now?

LT: I think it must have had something to do with the relationship of the people and God at that time. It must have been an indication that something was not right with the relationship between the people and God. Maybe the problem was with the leaders.

RF: By "the leaders," you mean the Catechist? Or the chiefs? Or...?

LT: Whoever the leaders were at the time. But I'm thinking mostly of church leaders. It must have had something to do with the relationship of the church leaders to the people. If the church leaders and the people are not happy together--if something is wrong with their relationship--that reflects a problem in people's relationship with God. That's how I see it, but other people might have a different interpretation.

RF: Pu Teuku told me last night that he'd heard it happened three times, and he thought it was important to know when it happened in the service. Was it at the beginning, or at the end? Because his view is that Jesus mediates between the congregation and God the Father. If it happened at the end of the service, it would signify that Jesus had listened and was turning around to face God to convey the message of piety and respect that was being conveyed by the congregation. But he was told that, no, it happened at the very beginning of the service. And that made him think, as you said, that it was a sign of displeasure with something which was going on among the congregation. Does that ring true with you at all?

LT: Yes, I've heard that story. I can only tell you what I've seen myself. I've heard those stories, but different people have different interpretations.

RF: You don't have any opinion as to which of the interpretations is correct.

LT: Possibly, as Pu Teuku would say, it must have been Jesus communicating the people's prayers to the Father....

RF: But he said that would have been the case if it had turned around at the end of the service. However, he was told that it didn't; that it turned around at the beginning. So it was, in his opinion, a sign of God's or Jesus's displeasure....

LT: With the behavior....

RF: Yes. Something about the people's behavior .

LT: Yes; that's what I strongly believe. Because, as I was telling you, it was right at the beginning of the service when it happened. So I believe that it has something to do with the behavior of the people. Perhaps something like breaking the covenants, breaking God's commandments. The covenant between Him and the people. You read this in the Bible again and again. God warns his people when that happens. It always happened with the people of Israel, when God is not pleased with His people.

RF: Is there anything that we've missed that you think you should add? Any part of your life, or any issues that you think are important that you think we need to cover?

LT: I think that's almost everything. I don't think there's any important thing that I've missed. But in August, toward the end of my mission with the Brothers--our mission to the militant camps during the war--I had a dream. It signifies, I think, what I've been doing. I

was in a dance, *te poi mako*, which I composed in my dream. It was in a cassette tape with Pu Aramera. When I woke up that morning, I sang it into the cassette. I was standing in the front line of the Melanesian Brothers, and I didn't see any other Sister. There was only myself and the Melanesian Brothers. We were dancing, facing one of the armies. There was no one else in our group. I was right in the front, and I was dancing with a gun. We each had a gun.

RF: Do you remember how the song goes?

LT: It says that I was standing, fighting, without worrying or being frightened of the gunshots. I was trusting my life to someone beyond me. Someone beyond me was sheltering me from bullets. That's the first line.

RF: And it came to you in a dream?

LT: It came through my dream. I was dancing with the Melanesian Brothers and the Franciscans. Each one of us held a gun, and we were dancing, facing one of the armies. It's more like a victory kind of....

RF: A victory over fear?

LT: Over fear. That's what I was experiencing in my feeling when I was dancing in my dream.

RF: I've spoken to a lot of people who have been inspired by dreams, and who have tried to live their lives according to dreams. I know that's true of Pu Teuku. It's true of Tangaata i Avatere. A number of people have told me about important dreams in their lives. Was there any dream or vision, or message that led you to want to join the Church in the first place.

LT: You are asking something that, I didn't want to mention. But I think I will.

RF: Only if you're comfortable.

LT: It was the beginning of my journey as a Sister. I had a vision; it was not a dream. This was in 1975. It happened three times in 1975. I was at home, and I was a church keeper. Each morning I would go up to church and prepare before the service. That would be about four or five o'clock. At that time the church is dark. The first thing I would do was pray. I knelt down and prayed each time that I went to prepare for morning service. I did that every morning when I was church keeper, in 1975 and 1976. The vision came in 1975. It was one week during that time. I don't remember the month, but I remember the vision very well. The first morning I saw that vision, I went up as usual. I knelt down and had my prayer time before going out of house to prepare for morning service. While I was praying, a very, very bright light came from the right side of the altar and came straight toward me. I can't compare that light with anything else I've seen, even the brightness of the sun. It was beyond any worldly light that I have seen. It was so bright that it blinded me.... When I saw that light I was kneeling down. I opened my mouth but didn't know what I was doing until about six o'clock in the morning, when people gathered outside the church. They had come for morning prayer. When I woke up, the church was already light, and I found myself lying down in front of the altar. When I saw that light I was behind the church, but when I woke up I was in front of the altar. There are two steps before the altar. I was lying before the first

step. I must have been unconscious.

When I came back to the house and I was too frightened to talk about it. My father knew something had happened to me, but he didn't ask. The next morning I was frightened to go back in the dark, so I waited. At Anuta it was getting light at half past five, so it was about half past five that I went back to get ready. As usual, I knelt down and prayed. And the same thing happened. Three mornings--three times--this happened, and then it disappeared. After that, I noticed a change in my life. I was engaged. I had a boyfriend. But after that vision, I went to the boy's parents and I told them that I wasn't interested in marriage any more. My mind just changed; I didn't know why. They asked me, and I said, "No, there is no other boy. I'm just not interested in marriage. I'm interested in working with the church." They were terribly upset, and I said, "Sorry. I just do not feel..." So I broke the friendship with that boy.

That was how I started. I felt drawn to do more, but I didn't know how then. I had that vision three times. Then, in the second year after the vision, the priest, Father Fititei, came and asked me if I'd like to go to the training center. After that, I realized that I had a calling. The vision was the beginning of my calling. Since then I've been working on this all the time. The vision is there, but it didn't repeat after I joined the Sisters. At times I've wanted to see it again, but it didn't repeat. Only those three times, before I knew I had been called to do this work. I didn't dream about it, I just had this vision.

RF: Since you've been this deeply involved with the church, have you managed to reestablish good relations with your former fiancé and his family?

LT: Yes, I think they understand. They understood when I went back. After I left home in 1977, I didn't go back until 1982 or '83. When I went back I was in a Sister's uniform. They didn't know that I had gone to join the Sisters. Afterward, they realized that what I had told them before were the facts.

RF: You think that at first they didn't believe you?

LT: They didn't believe me. It was only when I went back for the first time on holiday, wearing this habit. Now they believe.

[Afterword: The shelter for abused women and children that Sr. Lilian was working on at the time of her death was eventually funded by the government of New Zealand and dedicated on March 6, 2005. It is named the Sr. Lilian Takua Maeva Christian Care Centre in her honour. It has been incorporated as part of the work of the Melanesian Board of Mission of the Anglican Church of Melanesia and is staffed by the Community of the Sisters of the Church and the Sisters of Melanesia.]