

From ^O_R Point ^O_F View

the Ladies of Mission Vanuatu

Wednesday 1-2-08 - Today is Aaron and my 9th anniversary. Neither of us can believe how quickly these last nine years have flown by. I guess it is just that way the older you get and the longer you have been married! I never would have thought that we would have had so much adventure in our first 9 years of marriage! What a blessing each and every year has been! To celebrate we went out for coffee and dessert at one of the local coffee shops. That is one of our favorite things to do and easy to schedule at naptime. Jeanette kindly came over and watched Melia while Kaela went to town with Antony for a while. Then when they got home he put her down for her nap while Jeanette put Melia down for her nap. Aaron and I decided to walk to town (for some extra exercise) and we thought that was a great idea since the coffee shop is air conditioned. However, as luck would have it, the air conditioning was broken and there was only one fan in the place...only we didn't realize it until after we had ordered and realized we weren't cooling down very quickly. Oh well...you can't win 'em all! We still enjoyed our coffee and chocolate mud cake (YUM!). And then walked home again. For dinner, our team and the Raines all went out for pizza. Not really to celebrate our anniversary but, it sure was nice to not have to cook on a humid day like today!

Thursday 1-3-08 - So, I'm working on my computer today. I've been hard at work for about an hour and a half now. And the ONLY way I knew I would get anything done was if I left the house. So, I asked Fiona to come today and watch the girls. I set up camp in the office in order to keep Kaela from coming for her little "visits" that she can't resist! When I'm at home, I may TRY to get some work done but I can't really work steadily because she always needs to tell me just "one little something"! So, here I am working and I am about due for a break because it's nearly time to feed Melia again. Nursing her for 30 minutes every two hours sure doesn't leave much time for doing anything else! But, that is alright - I wouldn't trade either of my girls for anything in the world - even if I don't get a single "extra" thing done! They are keepers!

Sunday 1-6-08 - Aaron left for Ambae yesterday morning, making it my first official day of just me to look after the girls. Fortunately, Eric, Shawnda and Mike are all in town and I can lean on them for help if I need it. Also, thankfully, he will only be gone until Thursday! Yea! So, it is a nice, short "trial period" for me to get used to having him gone.

Antony, Jeanette and Jeremiah all left for New Zealand this morning. We dropped them off at the airport on our way to worship. Eric and Shawnda and Titus went to Etas for worship so it was just Mike, Kaela, Melia and I in Vila. The crowd was small which wasn't too much of a surprise since we are still coming out of the holidays and most people are still in their villages. It's interesting (and sometimes frustrating) how life here kind of gets put on hold during the Christmas and New Year holidays. For two weeks you can pretty much count on nothing happening and no business being conducted outside of the tourist

industries. The country takes a holiday. For example, even though the man from the gas company came to look at what needed fixing on our oven three weeks ago - he said he wouldn't be by to fix it until the 8th - their first official day back to work after the New Year.

I always read that three year olds are more difficult than two year olds. Up until now I wasn't sure I believed it - but boy do I now!!! Sometimes I think Kaela is going to drive me crazy! She always pushing the limits and doing her best to negotiate for everything she wants. "Kaela, you can have two cookies." And she says, "How about three!" Seriously! All day long she is testing me and just how far she can get before I call in the discipline troops. And it isn't good because it is so STINKIN' hot today and my patience is short! Today at lunch I prayed for God to help me to be patient in dealing with her and to forgive me when I bite her head off and she doesn't deserve it. (which I MIGHT have a tendency to do when I am hot and cranky!) And during the prayer Kaela just starts pinching my cuticle on my little finger just as hard as she can. Why? I have no idea. I guess it just seemed like the thing to do. And I wanted to interrupt my prayer and whallop her but then it occurs to me that I'm being tested and I'm going to have to work on that patience thing and try to handle this in a proper manner. I'm not sure I like being tested! But, God must know I need it!

Fiona was sick today and so I told her not to worry about coming tomorrow to sweep and watch Kaela and Titus while Shawnda and I went to the store. So, it took some orchestrating and all three of us (Eric, Shawnda and I) to take all three kids to the store and do our grocery shopping this evening. But, we finally got it done!

Monday 1-7-08 - Apparently, Melia had little or no interest in sleeping last night because I was up and down with her all night. She did GREAT on Saturday night but last night was a whole different story. I found myself awake and ready for the day (against my will) at 5am. That's a little earlier than I would have liked, but what are you going to do?! Nothing that some strong coffee won't cure!

Tuesday 1-8-08 - Melia did SUPER last night and slept from 8:15pm until 4:30am! Yea! I feel so nice and rested! It's amazing what a little sleep does for me disposition! And she went right back to sleep after I fed her so I didn't end up having to get up until 6am. I was the first one awake for the first time in weeks! Usually either Kaela, Melia or both are hollering for Aaron and I to crawl out of bed long before we are ready in the morning!

It has been SO RAINY this week! Pretty much since Saturday night we have had off and on storms every day. It POURED down rain this morning so much that our front yard had a river running through it. Of course all this off and on rain with off and on sunshine makes the air nice and heavy! Due to the rain I haven't been able to do my regular walking and I haven't gotten out with the girls. Kaela is definitely ready to get out so tomorrow morning she is going to play group with Rhonda (our NZ neighbor) and her two boys. She always had a great time at play group and it will be good for her to have some time to be away from home and spend with other kids.

Thursday 1-10-08 - Aaron came home tonight! Yea! I am so very happy! I had Mike go pick him up at the airport since as of now I have no way to take Melia in the truck by myself. We don't have seatbelts in the backseat so I don't have anything to hook her carseat into. So, anyway, Mike went to pick him up and Kaela got to go with him. She was thrilled to death about that and I am pretty sure she talked Mike's ear off the whole

way to the airport! It's great to have him home but sorry to say, he came home with another famous "Ambae rash"...he got into contact with something similar to poison ivy and now his feet are all swollen and red. The good news is that he isn't contagious!

Saturday 1-12-08 - Last night we celebrated Fiona's birthday. Her birthday was actually on Wednesday but since the team was meeting for dinner last night anyway we went ahead and planned a party for tonight. Shawnda and I decided that she needed a fun American birthday celebration so we made spaghetti for dinner and even baked her a Betty Crocker (new in our grocery store from the States!) yellow cake with chocolate frosting. Flexon came for the party also (of course) and Leila was supposed to come but she couldn't make it. All in all it was a great time for us all and lots of fun!

This weekend I saw two bugs that I have never seen before in the entire time I have lived in Vanuatu. I found a cricket in our house which I find to be kind of strange since I have NEVER seen a cricket in this whole country. And then Eric and Shawnda found this huge (2 inch x 1 inch) rhinoceros beetle on their front porch. It was huge and black and disgusting and thankfully, dead. I was amazed to simply look at it but Kaela once again shocked my socks off by asking Eric to HOLD IT! Gross! Kaela, the girl that freaks out if she gets her hands dirty! She wanted to hold the large, dead beetle! Crazy girl!

Sunday 1-13-08 - Aaron went to Etas for worship this morning. He was so pleasantly surprised because they knew he was coming and he just assumed that he would be preaching. However, when he got there Tom preached and all they asked him to do was to lead the Lord's Supper! It was a such a great feeling for him (and all of us!)! Just that one act showed us how much the men there are growing spiritually. They didn't rely on him to preach and take the lead just because he would be there but they stepped up and took responsibility for their congregation. We were so proud of them!

There was a small group again in Vila. Only 4 of the regular Christians and 1 visitor plus Eric, Shawnda, Mike and I and about 11 kids. I'll be glad when the school holiday is over (like summer vacation in the States). Everyone is set to start back to school on Jan. 28th so people will be coming back from their villages and islands and hopefully, after that attendance will be better in Vila. We have a fellowship planned for Thursday evening at our house. I'm going to put out some snacks and then we can sing and play games.

Monday 1-14-08 - Shawnda and I did our grocery shopping this morning. We were really on top of things because we got it all done by lunchtime! Yea! We've been having endless days of rain for over a week now and I am SO READY for a nice day of sunshine! I washed sheets this morning and they should get dry even though it is raining. I'm hoping tomorrow will be sunny so I can get some more washing done. When we don't have enough sun (and too much rain) during the day then my washing doesn't get dry and I have to hang it all over my living room overnight so it can dry.

This morning I saw a butterfly outside of our house with a 4 inch wing span! It was the biggest butterfly I have EVER seen! Aaron said it was probably a moth but, whatever, it was still HUGE! Kaela was entranced by it and of course wanted to hold it. Aaron let her hold it for just a minute and then he made her let it go because the last butterfly she held, she held for too long and the poor thing didn't live to see the next day.

Tuesday 1-15-08 - What a GREAT morning!!! Melia slept ALL NIGHT LONG!!!! Yippee!

She went down about 7:30 last night and slept until 5:45 this morning. I woke up at 5:30 with shocked realization that I had not fed her during the night and had to hop out of bed to go check and make sure she was still breathing. She didn't sleep well on Sunday night and then didn't nap like she should yesterday so the poor girl was just all exhausted but too stubborn to sleep during the day! So, I guess she made up for it last night! It probably won't happen again tonight but I'll take what I can get! There's nothing like a nice, full night's sleep to make you feel refreshed in the morning!

Wednesday 1-16-08 - Well, apparently all this rain today (and there's tons of it) is because there is a cyclone warning for the northern islands. Thankfully, it won't come near us but it's still close enough that we expect to get some wind and rain from it. And there is enough rain today to shove me into gear so that I went shopping for some non-perishable food supplies and candles.

Tonight after dinner we made a quick trip to town to pick up those infamous cyclone supplies and also some bananas at the market. When we got to the store Aaron and Kaela went in first with Melia and I behind them. As I started to step through the door I noticed something bright green laying on the ground. I looked down and was surprised to see Kaela's flip-flops! She had taken them off before she went in the store, leaving at the door in true Vanuatu custom! Except that custom only applies to visiting someone's house not when you go in the grocery store! It just caught my funny bone that it seemed logical to Kaela to take off her shoes when going inside even if it was the grocery store!

By the time we left the market it was POURING down rain and we hadn't brought our umbrella (what were we thinking?). So, I simply stuffed Melia under my shirt and we ran to the truck in the rain! There was a whole group of market mamas that were watching me with great surprise! I don't think they had ever seen a white woman stuff a baby up her shirt and run out in the rain! When I got in the truck they all waved at me and were laughing! Too funny!

Tonight Aaron and I felt like playing games so we talked with Eric and Shawnda and called Mike and we all got together to play cards. We put Kaela and Melia down at their house and then set to playing Presidents until we were all yawning. It was a nice time and fun to just spend an evening talking and laughing for a change from the normal routine.

Oh! I forgot to mention this last week. But, it was a cultural thing that just struck my funny bone! Last week Fiona helped me move my living room around one morning. I had taken all the books out of my bookshelf and later asked Fiona if she would mind putting the books back for me. It wasn't until I had eaten lunch and went to go get one of my cookbooks that I noticed a major cultural difference between an American and a Ni-Van. (Sometimes it just hits me more than others, you know?!) All of my books were put back on the shelf backwards - turned around with the bindings to the back! It just struck my funny bone and I got a good laugh from it! Sometimes these cultural differences are small and hardly noticeable and sometimes it's like a neon sign on the wall! I could ask 50 Americans to put my books back for me and I'd be willing to bet that not one of them would put them back bindings to the back!

Thursday 1-17-08 - It's been raining off and on all day. Come to find out it is because of a cyclone. Did I already mention that a different day? Anyway, Cyclone/Tropical Storm Funa hit Vanuatu's north islands today causing scads of rain. With all the rain we didn't have a very good turnout at our fellowship. However, part of me has an idea that is due

more to laziness than to rain since the rain has only been off and on all day and not constant. We did have a group of 8 kids show up and that was it. They arrived in a Toyota corolla type car and watching all them pile out of it was like watching a clown car at the circus! They just kept on coming! Aaron and Eric played soccer with them in the front yard, then we had snacks and showed a Veggie Tales movie. They all seemed to have a good time.

Friday 1-18-08 - I hate ants!!! I hate ants!!! I hate ants!!! Is that okay to say? It may not sound very nice but it is SO TRUE! It must be because of all this rain but these horrible little, pinpoint size ants that run around at mach speed made a home in one of my cabinets for no apparent reason. Aaron and I found their trail all along the wall and doorway in our living room, across the hall and into Kaela's room where we found two good-sized nests of them under some toys in her closet. They had to have moved in while we were sleeping because I am pretty sure she would have noticed them among her toys in her closet. Anyway, we immediately set to work spraying them all with bug spray, then Aaron wiped them up with a rag and I followed by washing the walls and the floor with some cleaner in hopes of killing off their scent. There had to have been at least a thousand of them!

We had a really nice team night tonight. Fajitas...always a winner! And then we played Presidents (a card game) after the kids went to bed. It's always nice to spend time with friends having some good 'ol American food and fun!

Sunday 1-20-08 - I am starting an endeavor that I am not sure will be successful but I'm going to try it anyway. With Melia's aversion to heat and her wanting to nurse every two hours it is really hard for me to get out of the house to do the women's Bible studies that I used to do. So, I have decided that I want to do a kind of Bible study newsletter for the women in Port Vila and Etas. It is my hope that they will find some encouragement from it and also grow not only in their faith, but also in their knowledge of God's Word. So, I am working on a newsletter called Yumi Oi Mama. Loosely translated...All of us Mothers. The "mama" part isn't to be taken literally though - because in Vanuatu "mama" tends to be used loosely for any kind of woman - mother or not. Anyway, I hope it will be successful...we'll see!

There was a really good turnout for worship today - even if the majority of them were kids. We had about 15 kids and 14 adults present. Unfortunately, several of those kids will be leaving at the end of the month to go back to their villages when school starts again. We announced today that there will be another fellowship at our house on Tuesday of next week - hopefully the turnout will be better next week.

Aaron has to take the truck into the shop tomorrow so Shawnda and I made a run to the grocery store this afternoon. Not really how I wanted to spend my Sunday afternoon...but, whatever! You do what you have to do! And we had to take advantage of our transportation while we had it!

Monday 1-21-08 - Shawnda and I borrowed Mike's truck for a short while this morning and finished our grocery shopping (the butcher isn't open on Sunday).

We seem to have encountered a bit of a garbage problem in the city. And it is rather stupid, actually. Municipal has been unable to pay their bills as of late, so Unelco, the electric company, has seized control of the trash services and now we've been two weeks without anyone to come pick up our trash. Actually, the whole city has been without

trash service! On top of that the phone is disconnected and no one can find out anything about when trash will be picked up! What a mess! A stinky mess! Literally! So, Aaron got together with some of the neighbors who helped pay the dump fee and we all loaded our garbage cans into our truck and he and Tom went and took the trash to the dump. Who knows if we will have to do that again next week too! How ridiculous is that?! Don't get me started on the city that buys brand new Toyota Hilux's and Buick type cars for their government officials but can't afford to keep the trash service going for the city! What a waste. (No pun intended).

Wednesday 1-23-08 - Thankfully, this morning the garbage truck came rolling down our road this morning. We were wondering when we might see it again! Aaron is relieved that he doesn't have to take another load of our garbage to the dump later this week.

Yesterday morning we got on the ball and went to visit Kaela's school - Port Vila International School. She starts pre-school there in two weeks! They just built a new facility in a different part of town and so of course school fees were raised for this year! But, the new facility is really nice and I am so excited for her to start to school. I think it will be very good for her in a lot of ways to be around kids her age, learning new things and having a lot of creative outlets! The school fees are high - unfortunately, about \$440 per term - at four terms per year. Very high. I have no idea how that compares to private schools in the US. Aaron and I talked, prayed and thought a lot about where to send her to school (preschool and regular school). Even, though the fees are higher at PVIS, we know she will be getting an excellent education there. We also wanted her to be in a school that is kind of part of the "western world", where she might learn social skills (which I think is REALLY important for missionary kids) that will help her to adjust to life in the US whenever we decide to move back. (Like I always say, I don't want Aaron and I to be the only ones telling her that it ISN'T okay to pick your nose in public. Which isn't a big deal to do for the locals here.) Another reason we chose PVIS is because when she starts to "real" school her credits will transfer (is that what you call it even for elementary school kids?) to a school in the US. With the high standard of education there I don't have to worry about her being behind in school whenever she transfers. So, there you go. That's our reasons for choosing PVIS!

Friday 1-25-08 - This morning I worked hard trying to finish up Yumi Oi Mama, my newsletter to go to the women. I proofed it one more time, printed off my final copy, then made copies to Eric would have some to take to Epau village on Sunday. I made copies to sent to Epau village, Eton village, Etas village, Port Vila and some to send to Duviara Village on Ambae island. So, we will see what the response is to my efforts in making a newsletter for the women. I hope that it is well-received and most of all that it will help increase their knowledge of the Word and strengthen their Christian walk.

Saturday 1-26-08 - We had hoped to spend today as a family day, but then Aaron remembered that being Saturday, he, Mike and Eric had to go to the church building to mow and get the grounds cleaned up for worship tomorrow. That usually takes up all morning until lunchtime. The boys are definitely looking forward to the time when the local men will step up to the plate and take charge of things like that. Mostly, it has been a struggle finding someone to do that! Flexon tries but he has to work a lot (he's a self-employed mechanic). Claude, who had previously shown himself to be a strong leader is

very involved in the political scene here so he travels a lot and a lot of his time and attentions are devoted to that. Our team has spent a lot of time talking about the situation in Port Vila. Some weeks we are encouraged at some things that are going well and other weeks it is SO HARD to see how far we have to go in our work with this congregation.

We did spend some nice family time together this afternoon after the girls got up from their naps. About 4:30 we made it out the door and went on a long walk together. We walked to the playground and stopped so Kaela could play for a while then we continued on up a hill near town so we could sit on a park bench at one of the overlooks. It has a beautiful view of the city, the ocean, and Iririki Island and the resort that sits on it. It took us a long time to walk that but it was worth it! We came home and had a late dinner of takeout pizza. Which is fairly good but not NEARLY as good as what we get in the US!

On the pizza note we have found a restaurant called the Seven Seas Saloon (not really a true saloon) that serves pizza that is very similar to what we get in the US (mainly because they use mozzarella cheese instead of cheddar). However, it is a long way from our house so we only go there periodically and we NEVER order takeout from them. Their dine-in price for pizza is about what it is everywhere else in town, however, if you want to make it carry out it is \$10 more!!! Don't even ask me to explain the logic in that!

Sunday 1-27-08 - There was a pretty good turnout at worship this morning. The pack of kids were back and so it was nice to have a full Bible class. Kaela got a lolli for saying her books of the New Testament up to Hebrews. I was so proud! Unfortunately, Ann wasn't able to make it again this week. We found out on Friday that her little boy Jonathon (9 months) has a boil on his neck and has been in the hospital because of it. They are going to have to lance it and to do that they will put him under. I imagine they are afraid he might thrash around from the pain of having it lanced and they could accidently cut something important.

Shawnda and I did our grocery shopping again this afternoon, just like last week, because she has a doctor's appointment tomorrow morning at 7:30 and isn't sure how long it will last. So, that filled up a good portion of our afternoon.

Aaron and I and the girls went on a long walk again today. There is a new restaurant that opened up not far from our house (about 20 minutes walk) and they serve pizza so walked down to pick up a takeout menu. It may seem like we are obsessed with pizza but we really aren't! Ha! It's just that whenever some place new opens up we have to check out what they serve and their prices because there are so few good restaurant in town that are "middle-of-the-road" price-wise. I can maybe think of two or three. There are tons of cheapo takeaway places (many of them I wouldn't buy food from them if you paid me!) and a lot of ritzy, resort type places that are reserved for special occasions ONLY. It turns out that this new place is placed on the ritzy list with the exception of their pizza which seems to be reasonably priced. We'll have to test it out sometime and see where it ranks on our list!

Tuesday 1-29-08 - Last night was so fun! Some good 'ol American fun! There is a new family that moved to town about a month ago. They are from the States and we met them because they were staying in the guest house at our next door neighbors (who are also from the States). The couple are named Luke and Ricky (short for Rachelle, I think). And they have two girls ages 3 and 5. There's also a woman named Jo that came from the States and lives with them - I'm not sure of the connection their - I don't think she is family

though. Anyway, we invited them and our neighbors (Jack, Kay and their son Jay) over for dinner last night. There were 11 adults, the 3 girls, plus Titus and Melia. A houseful! All we did was have dinner and talk but it was nice just to sit around and be Americans and talk about America (in English!) and American things! Which sounds funny but it's a big thing for us! We had a good American meal of grilled steak, mashed potatoes, corn, 3 bean salad, green salad and bread. And to top it off Luke found a store that had Mountain Dew for sale! Unfortunately, I didn't enjoy any because of the high caffeine level. Kaela had a GREAT TIME with the two girls, Shiloh and Mariah. I set them at their own table (which Kaela thought was so fun) and they talked and talked and talked. And then after dinner they played her room for a long time and then watched part of a movie before everyone left. I'm sure she'll be wanting to play with them again soon. Luke and Ricky aren't Christians (denominational of some sort) but they do go to church somewhere and I am thankful that they have that positive influence in their lives because I don't have to worry about Kaela having friends that are allowed to cuss around her or whose parents do or something like that. Anyway, it was really fun time last night and we will probably do it again sometime. However, we didn't say goodbye to the last of our company until about 9:00 and it was 9:30 before we got the girls to bed. Then Aaron and I fell into bed not long after.

Oh-I forgot to say that is had been a long day because Shawnda left for her appointment at 7:30 and Fiona was supposed to arrive not long after and take care of Titus (while the guys went to the church ground to work) and she was going to also hang my laundry and help me clean house while Shawnda and I finished up our shopping. Instead, Fiona called in sick with the flu, I baby-sat Titus and didn't get a lick done in the morning. I couldn't do much at my house because I have to close most of it off and stick close to Titus because my house isn't completely baby-proofed and Titus can manage to get into anything! Shawnda finally made it home at 10:30, I rushed around trying to get some clean-up done that I didn't get done in the morning, Aaron got home at 11:00, I made him and Kaela a quick lunch and headed out the door with her to finish our grocery shopping. It was nearly 1pm by the time we got back and then it was time for the girls to go to bed and I finally got to rest for a bit! I napped for about 30 minutes (much needed since Melia was up at 5:30 this morning) and was up and about getting things ready for the dinner party! What a busy, crazy day!

Thursday 1-31-08 - I can't believe that tomorrow is February! I'm gearing up for the two hottest and most humid months of the year and I'm not really looking forward to it! Some things about Vanuatu just kill me! And if you aren't familiar with that phrase - it means that they are bizarre or crazy or funny. Anyway, the Brandell's and us all had to go to the grocery store so we made a trip tonight after dinner. We were all browsing around the office supply section when we noticed this guy standing in line behind Aaron. He was a local and he was wearing a t-shirt and boxer shorts. Yep. Just boxer ever mind putting on another pair of shorts over them! We were all about to die in amazement and from laughing - of course we would never opening laugh about it but we sure got a good laugh about it later when we got in the truck to come home!