

Over the Easter period of 2019 I have had the experience of walking alongside Vinna as she has made the journey back to her village to reconnect with her roots ... her family. It has indeed been a privilege to be part of this.

On Saturday April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2017 we were given a young small broken girl and together we have returned a strong and healthy – resilient young being.

Two years is a long time to be disconnected from family, to trust others ... strangers ... to care for you... and returning was not without its doubts and concerns.

However, the most poignant moment unfolded at Whitesands airport in Tanna when Vinna's sister Elizabeth stepped forward and wrapped her arms around Vinna in pure love and joy – a smile extended across her face as she took in her younger sister – you could see she could hardly believe her eyes ... she had most likely thought she would never see Vinna again. She had genuinely missed her and had been looking forward to this day for a long time. Vinna's mother, father, brother and cousin were also in support and equally thrilled to see her.

This was the beginning of a welcome back that was embraced by the warmth and love of the whole village – a Grandmother and Grandfather – joyous and hugging Vinna in disbelief - and the children calling her name – she was still an integral part of the memory of this community – albeit looking a little different on her return.

The village celebrated her return both in song and dance – firstly the men chanting and dancing, then the women surrounding the men - their song adding crescendo to the celebration. It was so heartening to see Vinna leap up and be part of this celebration alongside her blood sister and amongst her village sisters. It was clear these were her roots – she was connected in every way.

The Chief of the village – Vinna's uncle – opened his korero (tok tok) in his native language and then followed with a speech in faultless english expressing how grateful they were for the healing, the caring and the return of their loved one to them.

The village offered gifts in appreciation of the work that had been done both medically and in her day to day care while in New Zealand – two live chickens, two large flax baskets of kumara and mats and baskets. These were generous offerings and this was acknowledged.

In my whakautu I thanked them for trusting us with their daughter, thanked them for their patience in the long time that the healing had taken and to let them know that we were not quite there and that she would need to remain in Vila for the next year for regular checks ahead of the final surgery.

I also responded to a reference to disability that had been made, by encouraging them to look for the ability in each and every person and not be focussed on the disability. I pointed to Vinna's leg and said she does not have a disability – she is a whole person with a whole lot of potential ability.

We were then treated to some kai – generously made for the visitors – and some more personal conversation with the chief and immediate family. There was an opportunity to explain using the sequence of x-rays, the status of her leg and the importance of not disrupting the process of healing – reassuring those close to her that the metal plate holding her leg together would come out in about 12-months' time.

When it came time for me to leave for my overnight accommodation Vinna was nowhere to be seen – blending in to the myriads of small faces that made up the hope of a new generation of villagers.

As Vinna has moved back into Ni-van life she has done so standing tall with confidence.

As we move forward in support of the next stage of Vinna's rehabilitation we do so with an open and caring heart and mind for all of those who are important to her and touch her life and a holistic approach to her clinical assessment and wellbeing.

Nga mihi nui

Glenys Parton  
ROMAC - New Zealand Region Chair  
April, 2019

