



NEWSLETTER 2007-1

February 15th 2007

Talofa,

Many of you have been asking for more news : blog or newsletter... When in Tuvalu, our blog is a kind of newsletter for our Francophone friends. Back in Paris, we usually send a newsletter to our Tuvaluan friends.. in English. That means most of you get half the news... One of our 2007 resolution is to keep all members and supports, either French or English speaking, informed more regularly... This document which grew considerably since I started it in English, last November, was translated and then updated in French by Fanny. Then the last part was translated into English... A lot of shuffling words around to relate what has happened since I left Tuvalu in October.... Another resolution: the next one will probably include pictures and... yes... will be shorter... Didn't we say that already? It is possible too that some of you don't wish to read or even receive such document. In this case, just tell us.

Kind regards to all

Gilliane (& Fanny)

End of 2006, chronology of events

Saturday 11th of November.

Talofa my Friends,

Today is WW1's Armistice day. A celebration day... a workless day. Not much happening to officially commemorate the ending of this 4 year war (1914-1918) where 8 millions men died.. 3 French old men, still alive, are the only ones today standing up & marching with the few other officials to revive the « eternal flame », to commemorate all soldiers who died in the 2 worldwars. I guess it symbolizes our soldiers's souls. And, here under the Arc de Triomphe, a solemn building built by Napoleon, is lying the « unknown soldier ».... Hmm.. Sorry for this history lesson. Although I dont feel much concern with this war, and never celebrated anything around it.... thinking about it, today, I felt like sharing this little piece of Paris with you... Probably because it is the first time I can sit down and let my mind wander in the recent past, the last 3 weeks since I left Funafuti.

Flashback from October 19th

This trip back was like a non-emotional one... a little how I felt years ago when I used to fly from L.A. to Paris and back once a month... The trip had become so familiar it felt not much more than a bus ride, certainly a little longer than in Funafuti, but not a trauma like when you don't know what to expect next... Of course there are unexpected things in a 5 days trip but everything went smoothly. Thanks, in Suva, to Leonie (FSPI, ex Canada Aid) who was just coming back from Tonga and offered me shelter and care again... Thanks also to John (Alpha) whose birthday it was and who is an Alofa dear support, coordinating and supervising the Alofa's staff in Suva. With them 2 Suva was really family like with nice dinner and brunch.

With John, we met Sikeli and Anare (Sopac) to finalize the ordering and try to straighten the delivery of the Amatuku's piggery and biodigestors material... The same afternoon, while shopping with Leonie, we run into Garry (UNDP). While sipping a cappucino with him... Sirpa (ADB) walked by a bit further. I could not help running to give her a kiss with the promises of writing later. Which of course I have not done yet. I sincerely like them both very much and I'm not at ease with discussing « business » matters preferring the casual friendly relation. The most emotional « running into » sequence was being able to say proper goodbye to Nala and Apisai at the Suva Motor Inn.

The day after, the now familiar Air Chathan flew me to Nadi and Air Pacific to Los Angeles. Nothing about the flight stuck in my mind after 3 weeks .. and the 48 hours in L.A. went by smoothly too. Chris was at the airport. My L.A. office and garden have not changed and the squirrel came to check on me as usual. No time in 24 hours to see my extended family apart from my best friend who came to get me out for a walk on the beach, part of the 50 miles long Santa Monica Bay facing the Pacific... on the other side of Tuvalu... Apart from the waves, nothing on this side of the Ocean to remind me of Funafuti !

The day after, Chris made the trip to Paris with me, to fix some « landlord's » problems in France. As the plane was approaching the Paris Airport, the passenger sitting in front of me got up : he happened to be a very good friend. An actor who was going to shoot a TV series in Paris... His mom with whom I had roller-bladed a dozen years ago on the Venice boardwalk was at the airport waiting for him. Nice surprise. The taxi ride to our Parisian hill brought us back immediately to industrial and urban countryside with its traffic jam and grey skies... but getting back home/office was warmer with Fanny waiting for us with a fridge full of goodies...(thanks to her and the other friends with whom I have been working or living with who have always made my home welcoming to lesser the cultural shock).

I have been in my home island since almost 2 weeks and that's how long it took to feel ready to settle back down. When I found myself buying a bunch of mimosa, nice smelly yellow flowers, returning from a long meeting with our National Energy Agency, I knew I was getting ready to reinstall myself.... The feeling was confirmed yesterday : I went shopping to restock fridge and cabinets for the coming winter... I also felt recently like reorganizing the whole office and setting up different administrative archives for the production company who has become very tiny business-wise since I decided to exclusively focus my attention and time into Tuvalu and Alofa. This sudden need for reorganization also meant I was ready to live without Pat in the office. Pat is the Lady who passed away last August while I was in Tuvalu and who had been working with me since over 15 years and in this present space since 5 years, when we moved on the hill. Like my mom, she's now in me.

Since I landed, many areas and themes were covered. The first one was Fanny leaving for Corsica a couple of days after my arrival... to the Wind festival where we had been invited last year too. She made the trip with Marianne, a great Alofa Tuvalu volunteer. 5 days in a French Mediterranean Island, I know of worst things to do..... I'll let her tell her story.

« The wind Festival 2006 was for us the occasion of a massive comic books dissemination: 2000 "our planet under water" and at least as many copies of "the Megapoubs invasion", its little sister focused on waste and also published by the French energy agency . Lots of children, teachers and other people visited our Tuvaluan style booth. Among them, two girls from Tahiti living in Corsica since 15 years asked us to send their best wishes and friendship testimony to our Tuvaluan friends. They recognized our international Sarah in Trouble in Paradise which kept playing in the booth. They had met her at a biomass conference a few years ago in Toamotou atoll. What a small world we are living in ! Lots of Corsica inhabitants also offered asylum to Tuvaluan people. And the guy responsible for the philatelic office dreamed of a twinning with Karl's office in Funafuti. Philippe Desbrosses, director of one of the two French companies who positively answered Seluka's request concerning organic seeds for Tuvalu, was there too. He was very moved to hear seeds were doing good under the Tuvaluan weather and he offered more when needed. »

Upon Fanny's return from Corsica, one of the main activities for 2 weeks was insuring the partnership with ADEME, our National Energy Agency for the Amatuku's training center. All parameters had to be changed a few times to get to a satisfactory contract. Quite an unexpected load of work but we felt so much support and they did themselves so much work to make our agreement happen before the deadline that we all felt very positively energized. We also had to update a funding request file for the reproduction of 6 « Big Top Events ». A great surprise, after a year, to receive a mail from this potential funder asking for more documents ! Now we cross our fingers.

Of course, the construction of the biodigestors at Amatuku was also pretty much all the time in my mind and agenda. Daily communication with John to make sure the material we had ordered could make it on the Nivaga ; a few exchanges with Kelesoma and Sikeli about it too... Not enough. I feel behind and being that far away does not help being a coordinator. More money was sent to Alofa/John's account in Suva to pay for the whole material and supposedly everything should have gone smoothly. But to this date, the saga is not finished. We still don't know what and when can get on the next Nivaga trip.... Or how much it costs. Most people seem to think it would be great/normal if it was a GoT contribution to the training Center. But having let the issue a bit in a limbo, not discussed officially about this possibility, we have of course planned for the payment... It would be a pity though if the material sat on the Suva wharf for ever.. I have visions of material (therefore money) getting wasted... The aspects which can provoke panic: the ones I don't know about... such as the situation pointed out by Chris : the cement bags have to be covered if not mixed with rain water cement becomes unusable.... Logical but I had not thought about it ! I feel guilty of not having prepared enough the whole process of shipping... But most of you, in Tuvalu know by now that we this humongous EU funding request we had to do over 5 weeks while we were there pretty much kept us from doing what we had come for... Anyway I cant help not feeling guilty... That's my nature. Thanks to all of you who have helped then, who are helping now. Thanks too to the ones who will be helping later !

Chris left early November in order to use his voting rights... soooo important... to get a proper American senate ! The week-end before, he shared with us an exceptional moment of « representing » Tuvalu and you all at the first march for Climate. An hour before the event, we were preparing our attire after deciding the best way to represent as many Tuvaluans as possible was to stick pictures on the biggest space possible... And so we went, walking billboards with pictures of Risasi, Penni, Susi, Nala, Eti, Kelesoma, Vete, Fong, Agatolu, Semese's son, Kalisi and others... Not only did I feel happy to be there and to make the national news with our « alofa tuvalu » banner, but Chris's attitude was another satisfaction. Till then, he had difficulties feeling part of the Alofa Tuvalu group. Obviously, I always knew I can count on him for many things but I was missing this aspect... At this march, we could not help noticing how involved he got. A couple of days before another one of these positive and constructive attitudes had struck me. As part of a supporting NGO to the march, we were invited at the press conference. I just wanted to show support by being present and meant to go back to business as soon as possible. No plan to speak to media. Chris, announcing himself as Alofa Tuvalu asked a question raising a good point and soon after we were interviewed by 3 radios !

After Chris departure, Fanny and I attended 3 events over 4 week nights : An Amesty International evening, about the Sarayaku Indians of Amazony and the right of autochtone people when they are unlucky enough to live where there's oil... then oil companies make all the decisions... The good news is that they keep fighting... but for how long... Another civilization very vulnerable to western way of life and for them too, a change in our daily lives would help keeping them on their lands... On tuesday, as implied in the title of the event, the Environment Tuesday (a monthly event we regularly attend, created decades ago by a couple of good friends, one of them being

the Ricard lady... i.e. Pernod/Pastis company which bottles sent via their Sydney office never arrived in Tuvalu). Wednesday we enjoyed a concert by Laure's life partner, Eric, in a small parisian theater, a nice evening.

Many demonstrations of « Alofa a Alofa Tuvalu » everywhere kept us going..... many supportive mails including a very impressive candidate as a trainee for 2007... Love/affection is everywhere.. I can feel it all around me daily. Uptill the shopping center delivery man who makes an effort to deliver my goods first although I told him there was no rush...

Today, to celebrate Armistice day, I'm granted the privilege to let the day go where my feelings take it... After a long sleep, this -as usual already too long letter -was my first impulse.... We'll see if or when it will be sent..

Fanny – January 10th Update

End of November, we crossed Paris to meet a few friends at the International Environment Film Festival... in one of the oldest and prettiest movie house, la Pagode.. The reception happened at the Regional Council building, another beauty ! We staid long enough to go around the room and hug Monica «from Ekwo » as we introduce her each time we can... A member of Alofa Tuvalu, her magazine, a unique example of ethical environmental magazine, should be more widely spread... We also managed to put an English version of our comic book in the Region President's pocket... Our funding request is still pending there since mid 2005 !

The night after, Pierre Radanne, the specialist who did, for us along with Sarah, the energy study, was leading a conference in our area, about the Paris Climate Plan which he helped draft... He was really good and the audience not only appreciated but much of them got convinced they had to start acting.

We went out again, the following week end to drop some more comic books to the « Children Newspaper » booth at the Youth book Exhibition.. The magazine is one of the most faithful partners on our « Big Top Event- Our planet under water » operations.. Gilliane had taken her 3 years old grandson along.. He had a ball... and got books to read for the whole year !

Then December came around, with its specific decorations... Christmas flavors are in the air.. A perfect time to call our yearly Assembly. Severine, our treasurer and her wallisian husband, Mika, made the trip to Paris from the south of France where they are now based. Amongst the participants : Cyril who comes each week end from Belgium to see his children, Laure who was starting her documentary project about Alofa tuvalu's actions, Linda who was finally able to see and hear Gaby interpret the « I got burned » translation she had done for Gilliane's birthday... Marianne with several types of « madeleines », very french cookies, soooo good.. and her husband, Michel... Lisbeth, Alofa's vice-pres, got her personal debriefing the day after... Reading the cards (one of her specialties) she predicted a great future to Alofa.... Outlining to « the boss » she should be more careful with her health. We did not know what it meant yet.

After that, although we wished to be able to take it easy for a while, there was just no way. Beginning of December, we even had to pull our sleeves to catch some bad news...

On the media front, we are harvesting what we planted and, for several weeks, every big media, mainly tv contacted us. First, there was Laure's project for the 2nd national channel, recently postponed... (a big relief for Gilliane who was really not ready to travel yet)... Then another magazine on the same channel was considering airing some of the 2006 kind tides.. to finally.. giving it up... Next was the first national channel's main news magazine, pretending they wanted to do a subject about Alofa Tuvalu to have easy access. Then the 5th channel and finally a very popular documentary magazine about Oceans 'Thalassa »... In between the hundreds of pictures Gilliane shot, the info and contacts they think we have, Alofa Tuvalu is becoming a key to Tuvalu... And with our site, requests pour in from all over the world... from many type of socio-cultural arenas... Many students, teachers, and of course... journalists... Some are polite and honest, many are not... So we are being very very cautious... and never give up our contacts before making sure it could be good for Tuvalu and asking

the people concerned before. We can't help remembering what some of you told us about these people coming over, taking you for granted, using your words and pictures without ever sending a copy of their works over... Hopefully you've learned how to behave with these "sharks". We are still learning ! We would tell you if someone commendable was to come over. If we have not... please be aware... it's not because a journalist is French that he/she'll be honest..

Amongst the not so honest... the main media group has been using over and over on several of their channels and cables some of our pictures without ever asking us..... Of course we are trying to stop the hemorrhage and brought the case to our lawyer. Another example: a printed newspaper asked us many information with the offer to write a few lines about Alofa Tuvalu... They pretended a technical problem and, guess what ? Although they used all of our words, the mention never happened! The good thing is : Jocelyn's and Laurent's (who had made the trip in Funafuti in 2005) pictures got in there and they got paid for them.

December 22nd

On a more positive note, we are frequently invited to different programs on the Direct8 cable.. This Sunday 14th of December, we discussed the environmental refugee statute issue... along with another member of Alofa, Laurent. He also spoke for the people of Bangladesh!

Climate change is now in every conversations... media... politicians... Pre election campaign... As every one seems to agree, one can hope action will follow...

Another slight deception: Our first partner, the Pacific Fund, informed us they could not finance the current project. Their role is to initially help, not to follow up... However, the French Development Agency, the financier for the Pacific Fund, will be our next contact.

Yet another news which tended to depress us a bit was the refusal of a project Gilliane, Sarah and I had been working on for months... We had answered, at the request of an ADEME division, a call about CO2 compensation within the frame of the Rugby world cup... We tried to explain as a start that in Tuvalu the emission reductions would be tiny and probably of little interest for their call.. The guy in charge being so enthusiastic, we got convinced the time spent on this file might not be wasted... Wishful thinking ! After many documents and dozens of emails, the guy financed an audit to check the numbers... Again, their so called expert put us to work... and of course they concluded that the CO2 reduction was tiny ! 6000 euros wasted to get back to square one ! 6000 Euros could have allowed to build a small biogas digester !

By luck, this did not alter the trust and friendly relations we have with Ademe... And for Christmas, we received the contract for the biogas and biodiesel in Amatuku signed by the International division, and confirmation from our friend at the communication direction, they would help finance an exhibition kit and a few hundred T-shirts. Not enough to give away without counting but these first 500 will become collector's items as soon as printed...

That allowed us to play around a bit at night, creating the kit (3 banners 1,20mx1m)... A good mental recreation... When you'll see it, you won't believe it evolved for days on full size cut papers draft... and thousands of pictures reviewing. Thanks to Elisabeth whose graphic talents and eyes will give this kit the necessary polishing !

Another file which took quite a lot of our time : the fish documentation project.... Not our cup of tea if we except Severine's phd in water. We are doing it mostly for Tango and FSPI. Approached by Total, the French Petrol Cy, over a year ago... we discussed biodiversity projects to be funded with Tango we ended it up working on the fish documentation. Final draft is almost there... but communication not being always easy in between Europe and Tuvalu, this has been dragging since.... Thanks to Total for its patience and hopefully they won't have spend their yearly budget on other projects...

In between this and that, we briefly met with Gilles (the French biodiesel specialist, met early 2006 in Suva) at one of the 5 Parisian train stations... Just enough time to grab a fast lunch and hear him confirm his investment in the project.. and a possible trip in 2007.

Finally, as you know, 2006 ended with the now traditional mailing of Alofa Tuvalu's Season Greetings notes, a good way to get back in touch, tell people we love that we love them and thanks everyone who is giving a meaning to the energy we put into "Small is Beautiful". So thank you all again for the friendly and supportive messages received for the new year.

I must admit that these surges of affection arrived just in time to warm up the seagull's wings which seemed to have been stuck into a pool of oil... Like a little soldier, since she came back, she had been overlooking everything : an eye on the Alofa business from Paris to Fiji situation.... Dealing with it with humor and turning into derision our cargo being stuck in Suva... The other eye had to focus into ETC's (the small production company) business and yearly administrative documents. There she's been trying her best to replace Pat's, trying to hide the understandable emotional load seeing Pat's name written everywhere... The third eye was turned toward the pictures which she was eager to start editing.... when a series of health problems struck. The most serious : lungs and sun spot on her face which needed to be removed. By chance, the analyses revealed it was benign... This and that, Here and there, it was basically "when it rains, it pours..." and the year ended on a fall... on her back.. in the stairs.. At this point, I wondered who could have interest to keep our Seagull from flying ! Strong as a rock, though, she got up with a few bruises but nothing broken...

2007-January 15th

The Seagull, as Fanny called me, using my old nickname, is taking back the nib... Not only nothing was broken but, the first best news of 2007 is the return of bright moods.... Yesterday I even had my first laugh to tears.... Amongst the parameters which helped me to lower my stress level these last months : the decision not to set a date for the next trip, not to feel a blade hanging over my head... I'll leave when I feel ready, when my lists will have lowered and when my files all over my desks will be treated and filed. So when people ask me when I go, mainly journalists who have been pressuring a bit to get a date, I just say "I don't know and don't wanna know... If the biogas material boards the cargo before I feel like flying over, Sikeli will make the trip with Chris who'll help organizing the construction with Vete and Eti and the workshop around the construction. (Kelesoma informed us he wont be able to help much since he has become Apisai personal assistant..) Sarah will join them a little later and I might make the trip with Gilles (the biodiesel specialist) sometimes in April...

So yes, 2007 has started on good omens... even though there are still not so good ones, such as the fact that we wont be able to live in the Ocean Side House... Selepa and Ivan rented it for 2 years...

Last bunch of good news : after a very constructive meeting with the French Development agency and a contact from Greenpeace for some kind of cooperation in between Alofa Tuvalu's projects and Greenpeace development in Niue, we got confirmation from another "bigtop event" in a town around Paris in May.. and last but not least.. the regional council confirmed the financing for 6 new ones... We also just heard that Our Planet under Water, our comic book, is being translated in Chinese.

We cant help being amazed seeing how far Alofa Tuvalu went in only two years... Again... Thanks to everyone... And, of course... Everything is still in front of us....

Take good care of you

Gilliane & Fanny