

Foreword

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On Wednesday 24 October 1990, when I was in my final year of high school in Port Moresby, and with about two weeks before the final Year 12 exams, I woke up one morning to my mother crying as she entered into my room. During those times, every morning either her or our father would walk in and wake me up for school. This morning, our father was away in Manus. He was then working between Mendi, Kavieng, Port Moresby and Manus and had taken one of his regular trips to Manus to check on their lodge, Lorengau Kohai Lodge. He called home regularly to check on us and when we spoke over the phone the night before he asked me how my exam preparation was going. I had told him things were okay and I asked when he would return home. His response was something along the lines of a lighthearted tiredness of being on the road so often; ‘Maybe never’ or ‘God only knows’. I remember those words and his voice because it was our last conversation. Through her crying, and my confusion about why she was crying as she entered my room, I also remember her words becoming clearer. ‘He is dead. They killed him’. I sat up abruptly, awake, and asked, ‘Who?’ or ‘What?’. She repeated ‘They killed him. They killed Papa’. I knew he was in Manus. He must have been killed in Manus.

I screamed and got out of bed and followed her to their bedroom where we made a phone call to my brother’s friend to ask him if he could go and pick my brother who was at work. Mama had already begun making calls to let people know. Mama was a political figure in Papua New Guinea and the news about our father’s death spread rapidly. The house began filling up with streams of friends, relatives and my parents’ colleagues arriving in shock to confirm the news or to mourn and offer condolences. My world was turned upside down, into a big fast-moving blurry place with a lot of wailing and moving people. I knew we would be going to Manus, and I thought that I would never return back to Port Moresby.

That day, amid the turmoil, a phone call came in and my mother took it. I recall her sitting in the corner speaking on the phone and waving me over to her. She was saying to the person on the line, 'It is best you tell her, and she hears it directly from you.' Curious, I took the phone from her hand. On the other end of the line, a female voice explained that she was a staff member from AIDAB (the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau, later called AusAID). She told me that my application for an Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (EMSS) had been successful. I had been selected for a scholarship to study economics at The Australian National University (ANU). At that moment, leaving our Port Moresby home in the direction of Australia, instead of Manus, was the last thing on my mind. I tried to explain that my father had just died and that I was returning to Manus for the funeral and did not know when I would return. The voice on the other end of the call informed me that they had already heard the news and she proceeded to calmly tell me to go to Manus and to contact them when I returned. My scholarship would be held for me. I cannot remember her name. At that time, I was Papua New Guinean. With our father being a former Australian citizen and with his family in Australia, our family had always lived between the two countries. Mama had made it clear to Papa when they got married that, if he married her, he was marrying her entire family and so PNG was the home they chose to live and raise us in. With our mother's family in PNG, her political career and our father's decision to become a Papua New Guinean citizen, we also held PNG citizenship. Both our parents were very proud Papua New Guineans, and they made this clear. When I reflect on my, and my siblings', education, each of our journeys seems to reflect our parent's juggling between life realities for each of our specific situations, their aspirations to educate us, year-to-year strategies for affording different forms of education, while supporting a large extended family. In my case, this included spending around three years living with my paternal uncle and aunt in Australia attending a public school. I think because of this, my parents never raised my expectations and nor did I entertain the idea that they would pay for me to attend university in Australia. I was encouraged to look for scholarships and to apply to what was available in PNG. They encouraged me in certain ways that, now on hindsight, I think also reflected their worries at that time. For example, in high school my favourite subject was art. However, my mother encouraged me to think about other career options. In any case, even after two years of art, I never saw my art portfolio because it got lost during the Year 12 examination process and the tumult when my father died. Despite scoring top marks for art and under average in maths, that day in 1990 set my life's

pathway on a different direction so perhaps any ideas I had about pursuing art were never meant to be. As a PNG citizen exploring options to pursue tertiary education, I was aware of the restrictions and costs of studying in Australia. There were not many scholarships around and I applied for the EMSS when it was advertised. At home, I applied and received an offer to do an arts degree at the University of PNG. I was also accepted to another Australian university; a nice but impossible dream for our mother to even consider supporting after our father died.

Both those events on that fateful day – the death of my father and the phone call informing me about the scholarship – changed the course of my life and marked the beginning of the life I came to know; defining my entry into adulthood, setting the course for my professional and scholarly journey. As we journeyed to Manus to bury our father there was a kind of darkness that comes when you combine sorrow, confusion and apprehension about the nature of his death itself and the unknown details of his murder and the investigation that followed. In the sea of faces of people present for his funeral and burial, someone or some people knew what happened. That phone call gave me an alternative world to imagine as my world slipped into that darkness of grief and uncertainty. After our father's burial in Manus and the customary five days mortuary ceremony, I returned to Port Moresby still dazed, and sat my Grade 12 exams. Now back in Port Moresby with the exams over and my imminent departure to Canberra, I resisted our mother's plans for us to return to Manus for the Christmas holidays. The way our father had died and with a scholarship to look forward to, Manus had become a sad place for me; I did not want to return. However, Mama was a strong woman and insisted that I return with everyone to Manus. It was an important return; beautiful and sad at the same time; it helped to keep me grounded.

By early 1991, I was on my way to Canberra. At the Port Moresby international airport departure area, I recall very shyly giving an interview to one of the national radio stations. The interview might have been arranged by the EMSS Australian scholarship officials because I recall the question seemed to focus on what I thought I would do with the education I was to receive in Australia. I recall responding along the lines of using the education to help the development of Papua New Guinea. A few hours later I was on a plane arriving into Canberra with a small cohort of other scholarship recipients. I stayed at the Ursula Hall college to commence an economics degree with the College of Economics. At ANU I met other Papua New Guinean students. In Canberra, family and friends formed an

important social support net as I immersed into life as an ANU Bachelor of Economics student. My mother came to visit Canberra soon after I arrived. I remember one conversation when she and I were walking from ANU to Canberra's city centre. I was feeling so sad and homesick for family and friends. I told her that I wanted to give up the studies and return home to PNG. I mentioned that perhaps I could return and take up the UPNG offer to study for an arts degree. But she did not want to hear a word of it. In no uncertain terms, she sternly told me I was to focus on my studies and complete the degree at ANU.

The scholarship must have been a great relief for our mother and other family who tried to fill in the gap our father left. In all the sorrow that arrived with that news that day, that phone call was like a light through a pinhole in the darkness. I could see some hope and relief in my mother's eyes. As she grieved and cried, she would also mention this good news. Reading some of the letters she sent to me and her diarised notes during those years after our father died, it is evident that she was grieving deeply and under immense pressure to try to figure out, along with other family members, how to cope after his death. I know that under the circumstances and with her knowledge of the challenges PNG women face, and what had just happened to her husband, our father, she must have been very worried about the kinds of challenges we faced ahead of us. At the age of 18, she and our father had already provided an excellent foundation for me, but without him around she would need support. The scholarship to ANU was a unique opportunity for me to study while relieving her of one worry.

I put my head down and completed my degree between 1991 and 1994 and graduated with a Bachelor of Economics with second class honours. I stayed at Ursula Hall college in 1991, Burton and Garran Hall in 1992, then moved off campus for 1993 and 1994. In 1993, my younger brother lived with me as he attended school in Canberra. In 1994, he would visit me over weekends in Canberra from boarding school in Goulburn. The scholarship enabled me to provide small but important support to other family and loved ones. It enabled me to return home to visit during those years.

I returned home to PNG in 1994 with my degree in hand and returned straight to Manus where I stayed and waited for responses to my job applications. I returned to Port Moresby in early 1995 after I received a job offer from the Bank of PNG to work as a monetary policy officer. I have always been drawn to social and development issues, and in 1996 I successfully applied for a job as a National Program Officer with the

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). I spent over 10 years as a national officer with the UNDP and then just under a year with the World Bank. In 2009, facing challenges in life and after our daughter fell very ill, I made the decision to migrate to Australia when I found out that I was eligible for Australian citizenship by descent because of my father's citizenship before he took up PNG citizenship. I took up Australian citizenship and moved to Australia in 2010. Under PNG laws at the time, I had to forfeit my PNG citizenship. I cried so much when I lost my PNG citizenship. But now as a mother myself, I was making decisions for my family. In Australia, after some time looking for work, including working in casual childcare, I commenced my PhD in 2012 with the ANU State, Society and Governance in Melanesia program, which is now known as Department of Pacific Affairs. My PhD was very much motivated by my own questions about how we create social safety in our life, and how we balance life between the customary obligations and our aspirations for education, good health, motherhood and so on.

My career has been a journey since that phone call telling me that I had been awarded a EMSS scholarship to do economics. It has defined my professional life, my scholarly journey and my entire life since my father died. My mother's response to me when I told her I wanted to give up also taught me about being humble and pragmatic about life choices. Even if I was not sure if I wanted to do this course, or if I was more passionate about doing something more creative, at that moment in our lives she was very constrained in how she could support me. It was better for me to take what was available and follow the course of where it would take me, rather than return home to an uncertain future ahead of us. I have held this approach in my life. We don't always get to choose what we study or what life deals out, but when presented with opportunities, we can try to make the best of these opportunities. The EMSS to study economics at ANU was my opportunity and I have no regrets taking it. Even today, when some of my work is critical of the Australian government's approach to Papua New Guinea, I am always grateful to the Australian and PNG governments for creating the opportunity in that scholarship.

Anna Kent's book provided me with historic context and gave me an insight into the official side of the scholarship schemes and the various iterations of the Australian government's scholarship schemes through themes like decolonisation, national interests, Australian aid, foreign relationships, education policies and Australia's domestic political environment. A key argument of the book is that scholarship policies are characterised by

incremental iterative policy changes. I was intrigued to learn that the EMSS scholarship, which I was a recipient of, was a short-lived scholarship scheme which, according to Kent, was a compromise between the two major reports – Goldring and Jackson reports – commissioned by the Australian government. According to this book, the EMSS was another departure from the trend of iterative change and was an experiment in redefining the role of recipient government's decisions over scholarships.

I read this book as a 1991 recipient of the Australian EMSS. I have sometimes wondered about the selection process and what and how decisions were made that led to that specific phone call being made on that day. How was the decision made for me to do economics at ANU? It is so long ago, and perhaps it does not really matter now. I have simplified my story for the purposes of reflecting on the importance of this book because I believe that it will be of interest to a wide audience within and beyond academia and the policy space. The case studies drawn from the official records of scholarship recipients were an excellent way to introduce the key themes and underlying policy and political considerations at the time. The case studies also help to bring the book closer to readers who have either directly been recipients of scholarships or have been a family member of a scholarship recipient. Like me, I know the book will prompt many scholarship recipients to reflect on the questions of how the Australian scholarships shaped their lives. What specific iteration of Australia's scholarship policy did their scholarship come under, and how and why were they selected for the scholarship? How did each of our experiences, individually and collectively contribute, or not, to the goals of those policies? Each scholarship recipient has our unique story to tell about the ways the Australian scholarship shaped our lives and careers. All our stories are rich with multiple relationships that mean that the actual reach and influence of the scholarships extend far beyond recipients of scholarships and the state bilateral relationship.

Given the changing geopolitical context that we find ourselves in, international students, including recipients of Australian scholarships, will remain crucial to the Australian tertiary sector and Australia's engagement with the Pacific region. Importantly, the experiences and relationships formed as part of the experiences of scholarship recipients will remain important threads in the fabric of Australia's relationship with the region. This book provides an important baseline study to understand how the past shapes Australia's current and future policies on scholarships. It will also open new conversations and points of inquiry about Australia's scholarship policy discourse and recipients' experiences both in Australia and the region.

This text is taken from *Mandates and Missteps: Australian Government Scholarships to the Pacific – 1948 to 2018*, by Anna Kent, published 2024 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.