

# Beyond the Horizon:

By M. N. Crow

SUVA (Fiji) — My husband and two children sat across from me on the launch and the winter sun brightened their faces as we slipped across the Fijian waters.

They were tranquil and relaxed but my mind was churning. For shortly we were to land on the 220 acre island of Matagi. We had rented it for a week and I was beginning to have qualms about the whole thing.

We had come a long way to reach this spot in the South Pacific. After our flight from San Francisco into the international airport at Nadi, we had taken a 1½ hour cab ride over a dirt road to the Fijian, a splendid resort on its own small island.

The following day, we had hopped in a cab again for the four hour dusty ride through numerous Fijian villages to the Suva airport. From there it had been an hour's flight on a 15-passenger Fijian Airways prop plane to Taveuni, one of Fiji's outer islands, and from there an hour-long float to Matagi.

I pondered the eventuality of succumbing to an ailment or being bitten by some mysterious animal; I pondered the possibility of running out of provisions.

I even went so far as to worry what we would do if we became bored.

We approached land. The whole population of 30, smiling and friendly, was at the water's edge to meet us. As our launch came near the shore, the islanders splashed out toward the boat.

Before I knew it, the children and I were being taken to land nose-back and my

similar offer. The suitcases and boxes of provisions, which included everything from Fijian beer to pasteurized milk, went ashore on the shoulders of men and women.

They led us a short distance to our five room manor house, a very civilized abode compared to the primitive shacks and burees (grass huts) that sheltered the populace.

The house was set in a trim garden replete with a rich variety of tropical vegetation: wild orchids, poinsettias, plumeria, hibiscus.

The garden was enclosed by a fence to keep out the many animals, which in-

one turkey to a herd of cows to a wild horse that appeared only at sunset.

The toothless, 40-ish head boy spoke some English, as did Lisa, our house girl. Our house had the island's only plumbing and only electricity. In the evenings when our last light was turned off, the head boy would close down the generator for the night. At dawn he would start it up again.

We were delighted with 20 year old, handsome Verti, whose son was available as a playmate. Since the 7 year old's name in Fijian was so difficult for us, we were encouraged to call him by the English equiva-

Faraway immediately took charge of the children although his English was almost non-existent. In fact, while we were there Faraway managed only: come, hello, goodbye and one remarkable effort that went "Would you like to buy one of my ducks for 10 cents?"

It seemed he was sole proprietor of the island's ducks. Head boys' sons have many privileges.

Our island was a copra plantation. As we hiked around it, Faraway would shimmy up a coconut palm to get a nut. Verti would hack off the end with a machete and we would drink the milk or munch on



Fijian island villages don't have washing machines, but there's good gossip down at the creek

# Private World Named Matagi

Each day Verti thought up something new. One night it was going torching. He took us off in a punt by moonlight, one person standing at the helm holding a Coleman lantern.

We took turns attempting to spear fish. Only Faraway could do it.

Another day Verti took us off in the outboard to Horseshoe Bay, around the island, the best spot for viewing the brilliant fish and coral.

The Fijians had rigged up heavy box-like devices with glass bottoms and we held these (with aching arms) over the sides of the boat to spy on the fish and the reef.

Boys dived down to re-

trieve giant clams with their bare hands.

Boredom never entered our lives. We became used to a calmer, slower existence. When not on an excursion, we swam, sunbathed, gathered shells, read and played dominoes.

When the day for leaving arrived, our friends gave us presents. Verti and the boys, deciding that the

shells we had collected weren't beautiful enough, gave us some of their most treasured ones.

The ladies ceremoniously presented us with a hand-woven bag (for me), two hand-woven rugs (for our son) and hand-made shell necklaces.

This time the whole population carried our bags down to the water's edge and helped us out to the

launch. As our boat sped away, we could barely see the people through our tears.

For one week we had observed and enjoyed people whose lives were as simple, pure and good as we would ever see. We had lived in paradise.

What would civilization hold for us that would measure up to that Fijian tranquility and wisdom?