

15/03/2009

Over this coming Easter the ***Melanie Jewson Memorial Chapel*** will be opened at Vila Central Hospital (VCH) in Pt Vila, Vanuatu with sixteen of Melanie's family and friends in attendance. Melanie Jewson was my niece; a beautiful young lady with a very generous spirit; the daughter of Libby and Gary Jewson of Bannockburn; sister to André and Ashlee. The Chapel is the culmination of the vision of Leipakoa Matariki, CEO of VCH, Janet Ores, immediate past Director of Nursing at VCH, Leitare Raubani, Chief Physiotherapist at VCH and the love, inspiration, dedication, hard work and persistence of Libb and Gary and the labour of many people.

In January 2003, eighteen months before her death in a motor vehicle accident in August 2004, Melanie had travelled to Pt Vila with Libby who was undertaking a clinical placement in Exercise Physiology at the Physiotherapy Department of the Hospital. The physiotherapy department and the hospital are very poorly equipped and on returning home Melanie set about raising funds and equipment for the Hospital.

Through donations and the proceeds of a concert, 'A Gift', which was held a year after Melanie's death, over \$32,000 was raised for the Hospital, since then a further \$15,000 (approx.) has been raised. When approached as to how they would like the money used; Leipakoa, Janet, Leitari and others from the Hospital community said that they had always wanted a Chapel and meeting place; a place of Worship; a Sanctuary for people to use for prayer and meditation and a meeting place for small conferences and staff educational events.

In consultation with Libb and Gary and the Hospital, Mr Tom Whipp designed the Chapel and offered to supervise and assist in the construction of the building. Tom is a builder and missionary from the Northside Christian Church in Queensland, who was already building 'Shekinah House', a local version of 'Ronald McDonald House' at the hospital. Tom recently finished the pews for the Chapel, building them from local rainforest timber.

The Chapel has been built with the assistance of many people; sailors from HMAS Manoora assisted in digging the foundations during a stopover in the Port. Tom and some local workers he employed had made a good start when in August 2006, Libb and Gary and over 40 friends and relatives (including three of Melanie's elderly grandparents) visited Pt Vila and assisted in construction. A highlight of this trip was the creation of a beautiful butterfly mosaic set in the floor in front of the altar inside the chapel. Further building occurred over the following two years; there was assistance from members of the Assemblies of God, Seventh Day Adventist, other churches and local community members. In August 2008, Libb and Gary returned along with seven friends from Geelong, Bannockburn and Horsham and I was privileged to come along as well. We spent two weeks constructing stud walls, windows, door frames, plumbing, painting and fixing architraves around windows and doors. The highlight of this trip was the installation of a slumped glass window (made by the Wathaurong people of Geelong), in the same butterfly design as the mosaic.

Some beautiful photos of the Chapel may be seen at the website; www.melaniejewson.com. Libb and Gary are also establishing an educational fund to assist in the education of young children in

Vanuatu, many of whom do not have the opportunity to go to school because their parents cannot afford the fees. Education is not free in Vanuatu. Anyone wishing to donate to this fund can contact Mrs Marian Wilson at Geelong Lutheran College on 03 5264 1038.

From a terrible tragedy has come a wonderful Gift to the people of Vanuatu.

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