

BUDDY & ZOEY, , SHE SAID "YES"!!!, THE WOODS FAMILY, ANOTHER WEIRD CRITTER, DAVID, BRIAN & ROB, IN MY TOP 10 DIVES, HONIARA, BACK TO "WORK", EVAH, HOUSEKEEPING, PEAVA SCUBA SCHOOL, A VERY TENSE EVENING!! BABIES, BABIES EVERYWHERE!!!

Hi, Everyone,

And yet another month of adventure, teaching, and travel has flown. Buddy Willard and Zoey Gregson were our first guests, residing in our guest house out here and reveling in its beauty and serenity, so much they extended their stay. Zoey was our first outside Open Water Class student, and outdid her certified buddy on air consumption from Dive #1. Buddying with villager Kido Jeffrey for her open water work, she sailed through classes competent enough to be introduced to an all day dive/picnic at our favorite Kicha Island. And the plot thickens. I insisted they have their photos taken by this tiny island with Mbulo, Gatokae and the sea as a stunning background! It is tradition. What Zoey didn't know, and we all did, was that Buddy planned to propose to her there- he did, she said a very surprised and happy "YES" and we captured all on camera, and my crew ceremoniously (??) dunked them both in the sea- another Solomon Island tradition.

Carolyn and Caleb (10) Woods, guests at Wilderness, did intros with me, Dellington, Viso and Bryan in "The Pool" with younger brother Liam snorkeling overhead. While dad Steven played with sharks at Kicha, and drifted through the giant fans at Toana, we discovered another weird nudibranch we have yet to ID and played with a baby cuttlefish who's become quite used to our attentions. David Lawrence, another surprise guest, enjoyed several island dives, while his young daughter (at 8, already a determined marine biologist) shared her finds with me snorkeling in the lagoon. We welcomed Brian Mackie and son Rob, who bickered and bantered good-naturedly at each other through a week of diving and fishing. They "hooked" us on reef hook diving, hitting Kicha in a whipping current, and sticking our hooks under a rock and floating above the reef to effortlessly watch the ongoing parade of sharks, jacks, snappers, mackerel. What fun.

It has become customary for us, when guests leave, or have finished their diving. to take a "play day"- and let everyone "off leash" As I was scheduled to fly to Honiara the next day, we could only do 1 dive . Something made me say "Kicha"- even though the ride out was rougher than this fair weather sailor enjoys! What incredible foresight. The action began from the second we jumped in, with schools of pyramids, our jacks and bat fish right atop the ledge. As we descended, in came the sharks- big grays through thick fish-falls of fusiliers, jacks and snappers that continuously swirled around us, while groups of dog-tooth tuna (bigger than me) and Spanish mackerel kept wandering through. One gray was particularly agitated as 4 huge remoras were attempting to hitch a free ride. One- well, OK- but 4 was just too much.

I yelled at Viso as he was photoing this shark to look out for the 5 hurtling up behind him- and as I turned and looked up I thought the reef had grown a huge extension. Instead, a massive hammerhead materialized, moving slowly out of vision. By this time, our computers were screaming nasty epithets at us, and we slowly began to rise and head around the point through schools so thick you could barely see water between the individual fish. And although the action changed, it never ceased as we came shallow. Ocean triggers were nesting- the males flashing their best colors as they rounded up willing females and chased intruders off; Meyer's, reticulated and oval-spot butterflies tempted our cameras. A monstrous topa

(bumphead parrot) let me within almost touching distance. Our pressure gauges finally forced us out, quite literally babbling almost incoherently in 3 languages about the wonders of our dive. I reminded the guys that we are very, very lucky people.

And I was boarding a Sol Air twin otter, Honiara bound. WHEW- what a week!! I hit the ground running, and except for a few free hours on Sunday, stayed that way virtually the entire week. Saw old friends and met some new ones- especially Lynette daWheya, brilliant young woman at the Foreign Investment Division, who's been helping me enormously with some legal paperwork. We spent far more time visiting and sharing ideas than going over paperwork. A cherished evening reunion with friends Mia Rimon and Val Stanley enriched us all, as we compared life notes since our last meeting. Both women are employed in community service in Solomons, and our ideas flow fast and furious, refreshing all of us.

The 2 day conference to restart a tourism industry association-newly named SITIA- Solomon Island Tourism Industry Assoc.- abounded with enthusiasm, energy, creativity and willingness. I was nominated and elected to the executive committee as an at-large member- which means more travel to Honiara. I really hesitated before accepting the nomination- but it's a big job and needs to be done. Here we go. This also puts me in the forefront for fighting for conservation. Knew I couldn't stay out of activism for very long----!

I voted at the US consular office barely in time to make the diplomatic pouch, and did a ton of shopping for the project. My "home" in Honiara, the Mendana Hotel (where I'm greeted with hugs and smiles) has completed construction of their stunning new wing. The posh new dining room boasts excellent food and efficient, friendly service. And it was home to hugs and 2 ecstatic puppies, and of course, out to Kicha for a welcome home, cranking current dive. It was good to be home. And time to pack Evah, my house staff, and Nate's wife off to Munda to await the birth of their child.

And with a break in guests, it is time for expanding our programs- AND- spring housecleaning. The whole gang pitches in, completely emptying the storerooms, cleaning, sorting and hunting for treasures. Periodically, the mad urge to have "a place for everything and everything in it's place" arises within me, usually lasting long enough to get all but the most tedious jobs done- which will still be there the next time--- and the next??? It is also time to reevaluate our programs, and with Divemaster course finished, decide how to expand and best fulfill our mission to open up the underwater world to as many islanders as possible. We have designated Wednesdays as "Discover SCUBA Days"- and yesterday, with my DM's doing most of the work, introduced 4 new villagers to the sport. My DM's are learning to deal with ear, water-in-mask or nose breathers problems, bicycle riders and all the assorted issues that can crop up on a first dive. I am right there to leap in if necessary, but so far, I am amazed at their patience and creativity.

A trip to Beka Beka to get online ended up in a tense and worried few hours, as Ronald, my boat driver, did not show to pick me up. He always fishes, and is often 15-20 min. late, so I wasn't worried until over an hour had gone by. Back up the hill, and down the Mountain Goat trail to Ropiko Lodge, where Barry and Jenna got on the radio calling for help. I was soon picked up by Viso, and we met Wilderness' boat speeding out with searchers and a powerful searchlight. Another hour went by before we had the news that Ronald was safe and sound, but that Kicha was sitting high on a reef. He had lost engine power during a surprise squall, and wind and waves had conspired to beach Kicha in spite of Ronald's best efforts. 20 or so

muscular guys gathered and 2 boats went out; they literally carried her back off the reef, and she seems OK, thank all the sea gods. 2 pots of Shivering Starving Divers' Soup, a hoard of Navy biscuits, 2 jars of jam and peanut butter, and gallons of coffee filled the hungry crew. It was well after midnight when I thankfully turned in.

And it is baby season- on the reef, I mean. Everywhere there are clouds of tiny brilliant anthias and damsels; tiny wrasses hide out in the rubble patches, the tiniest shrimp-gobies imaginable, with made to order sized housecleaning shrimp (how they find each other remains a mystery), maintain their miniature boroughs. Classes in "The Pool" yielded finger-nail sized cuttlefish AND Commerson's frogfish. Teeny butterflies hide in the table corals, and minute triggers dive under rocks. It's a great time to be diving!

And that's it for this month's Nius, gang. Hope you all enjoy- look forward to your notes!! PLEASE --A REMINDER-- DO NOT, NOT, NOT, JUST HIT REPLY. SENDS WHOLE LETTER BACK TO ME, AND ON SAT PHONE VERY EXPENSIVE. Either create a new E, or hi-light this letter and delete it before sending. Thanks so much for your help in this. Have a great month--

Lots love and hugs,
Lisa

Lisa Choquette
SOLOMON DIVE ADVENTURES
Peava Village- Marovo Lagoon
SOLOMON ISLANDS
lisa@solomondiveadventures.com
www.solomondiveadventures.com

"Lose yourself in the adventure-find yourself in the richness".





GIANT DOG-TOOTHED TUNA



PHOTO BY: JOHN VISO TIMOTHY

3000 MANY FISH !!!!!



PHOTO BY: NATESON HENRY

CAN YOU FIND ALL 4 PESKY REMORAS?



PHOTO BY: NATESON HENRY

OUR BEAUTIFUL SPADEFISH SCHOOL



PHOTO BY: NATESON HENRY

giant topa about to chomp some coral!



photo by Lisa Choquette