

Lowcountry Life



STEVE HAGGERTY ColorWorld

Fatboys Resort, built over deep water to accommodate boats and to protect coral near the shore, encourages guests to relax, or if absolutely necessary, sample the scuba, snorkeling, fishing and village walks. On Mbambanga Island, in Ferguson Passage near Gizo airport, Western Province, Solomon Islands.

FROM WAR TO WONDERLAND

Uncovering the secrets of the Solomon Islands

BY ANNE Z. COOKE
Tribune News Service

HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS

If it weren't for the potholes, cavernous pits slowing us down on the road to Honiara, in the Solomon Islands, I might have missed the sign on the tree, "Dolphin View Cottage." But Andrew, our guide, knew the road by heart.

"That's Guyas Tohabellana," he said, waving at a stocky, dark-skinned man in rumpled shorts, a faded T-shirt and flip flops. "He works here in Guadalcanal. C'mon, let's say hello."

Beyond the bungalow, Guyas' two teenagers lounged on a picnic table, playing with their pet cockatoo. Behind them the beach sloped down to iron Bottom Sound, the World War II graveyard where 50-odd American and Japanese ships lie at rest. Across the water, Savo Island shimmered on the horizon.

For a couple of minutes, the two men chatted, speaking Pijin so quietly I couldn't make out the words. Then Guyas turned to me and we shook hands.

"You're from America!" he said, switching to English and lighting up. "Do you like it here? Have you been to Gizo and seen the beautiful coral reefs? Yes, my grandfather was a coast watcher during World War II, a spy you'd say, reporting Japanese movements to the Americans. He watched the battle of Savo Island from right here."

A name and a handshake are de rigeur in the Solomons, deep in the South Pacific. Being American counts, too, especially here, where 5,800 Americans were killed or injured fighting the invading Japanese.

"We're known for two things," said Ellison Kyere, from the tourist office, when my partner Steve and I met him for lunch at the Lime Lounge Cafe, in Honiara. "For the battle sites and for scuba diving, under the water. It's time to tell the story of island life on land."

A tall order, indeed. The islanders, mostly Melanesian, are scattered over 247 of the country's 922 islands, speaking both Pijin and one of the country's 75 different languages. Some are farmers; some work for the government. Some wear grass skirts and use shell money for



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Market day at Gizo, capital of the Western Province, and a ferry stop, is a major event, attended by sellers, buyers and tourists, all arriving by water. On Ghizo Island in the Western Province.

barter; others are proud to count headhunters among their ancestors. A few own speed boats; most paddle to market in a "mola," a homemade dugout canoe.

We took the overnight Fiji Airways flight from Los Angeles to Fiji's Nadi airport, changed planes, then flew on to Henderson International Airport, in Honiara, the capital city. I'd brought my phone so I took advantage of the airport's "tour-

ist special," a SIM card good for 75 minutes, for just U.S. \$1.30. And we booked a guide for the next day's city tour.

We were still jetlagged the next morning when Andrew pulled up in a shiny black SUV. "All our cars are Japanese and they're all second-hand," he apologized. "Never get new ones. And the Japanese are building an overpass and paving the street and it's taking for-

ever," he added as we inched along past grimy storefronts and vegetable stands overflowing with greens, tomatoes and squash.

"That one, where everybody shops, is owned by a Chinese company," he said, nodding at a big-box department store, the kind we've seen in other third-world countries, there to pave the way to building and mining contracts.

I looked for something I could brag on — an American-built hospital or a college — but we'd already turned away, heading to the Memorial Garden cemetery, the American War Memorial and Bonegi Beach, famous for wreck dives. "That's Bloody Ridge," Andrew said, parking the car on a grassy hump of land.

Standing there, imagining the chaos of battle, it felt unreal to be gazing out over sleepy fields while at my feet, still visible, were the foxholes where 40 U.S. Marines died.

The trip — now nicknamed "Solomons 101" — began in earnest when we flew north to airfields at Gizo, on Ghizo Island, and Munda, on New Georgia, both in the Western Province, the gateway to equatorial rain forests, volcanic mountains, blue lagoons and sandy beaches.

Met by a skiff and driver, we were off, speeding over a shimmering blue lagoon, to Fat Boys Resort, an all-inclusive, palm-thatched lodge built over deep water, with five bamboo-walled guest bungalows perched on the shore. Our base camp for the

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FAITH IN ACTION

As Hilton Head Island's election season heats up, we should ask ourselves: 'What is true?'



BY BRAD BLOOM
Special to The Island Packet/
The Beaufort Gazette

In the political season, telling the truth and lying are always battling for supremacy over the minds and hearts of the electorate.

That's what's playing out in the case of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford and Supreme Court nomi-

nee Brett Kavanaugh. The scheduled Senate Judiciary Committee hearing this week offers us a different kind of challenge regarding the integrity of the judiciary and elected officials. How does one determine who is telling the truth and who is lying?

The Torah is explicit about the seriousness of lying. Mark Twain wrote, "There are 869 forms of lying, but only one of them has been squarely forbidden; thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." One of the Ten Commandments says exactly that.

In ancient times, according to Deuteronomy, witnesses were

LYING UNDERMINES THE FAMILY UNIT, INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE.

asked to stand before God by appearing before the priests and judges who adjudicated disputes. The Torah goes on to say that those judges were required to conduct the process of discovery in order to determine which individual might be lying. The consequences of lying

were serious: "So shall you put evil away from among you." That admonition was also intended to communicate a stern message to the public that they, too, shall learn and fear the repercussions of lying in a court of law. "And your eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Today, basic values which come from the Bible are supposed to be part of the bedrock of America's ethos of integrity. Ironically, liars running for elected office like to hide behind the shield of freedom of speech to justify their words or matter how hurtful, hateful or

untrue. "I have the right of freedom of speech" becomes their rallying cry and deflects our attention from the primary issue: is what they're saying true or a lie. On Hilton Head we have a mayoral candidate who uses the camouflage of our Constitution's First Amendment to advance his ideas of hate by questioning the Holocaust.

The Bible and later religious traditions from Judaism and Christianity understood that lying was a serious crime because liars not only diminish themselves, if not held accountable, they undermine the social fabric of society.

Lying undermines the family unit, interpersonal relationships and public discourse. The problem is that when someone, especially a candidate for elected office, tells a lie over and over again, there is a tendency

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next few days, the lodge was a short boat ride to Kennedy Island, where we went ashore to see where Lt. John Kennedy and his PT-109 crew hid after a Japanese vessel sank their ship. And close enough to a string of shallow reefs to spend a couple of hours snorkeling, before heading for a grilled-lobster picnic.

islands - were in season, so I stocked up with a half-dozen folded-leaf packages. Green tree leaves competed with slippery spinach (Malabar spinach), purple bananas, carrots and beet roots, commonly chewed here, an affordable substitute for coffee or cigarettes. "What do they taste like?" I asked an older man with red-rimmed eyes (the clue), who offered me a seat in the shade. "Do they make you feel relaxed?" I ventured to ask.



Views of hills and green pastures seen from Bloody Ridge, on Guadalcanal, stand in stark contrast to the half-sunken foxholes where 40 Marines died on September 12-13, 1942.

friendly, and a "descendant of the Rowiana headhunter clan," as he told us. Heading for deep water, pounding over incoming waves, we finally docked at tiny Skull Island, just big enough to hold piles of rocks and rows of ancient battles, victims of long ago battles. Going on to Lubarua Island, the PT-boat base where Kennedy and his crew were stationed during the war, we went ashore to visit the barracks and look at the monument. Aa, the keeper, produced a carved wood bust of the youthful Kennedy, which he hides at night. "It's been stolen and recovered twice," he said, leading me to a

group of rusty cannons. The real surprise was the modern bathroom. Two days later, as our adventure wound down and we boarded a 16-seat Twin Otter for the flight back to Honiara - an aerial tour over islands, bays, coral reefs, rain forests, volcanoes, waterfalls and mountains - I suddenly realized how much we'd missed. The Solomon Islands, spectacular, varied and pristine, with an annual visitor count of just 24,000, remains one of the world's last untamed destinations (www.visit-solomon.com.sb). The roads aren't awfully good, especially in the country. But potholes or no, we'll be going back.

FROM PAGE 5B FAITH

to believe the falsehood. We have seen how susceptible the public is to the charisma and persistence of a candidate who repeats a lie. The constant repetition of lying rhetoric saturates our mindset and we then sometimes take it for granted that it must be true. Iwain warned us that religion and politics required us to be discerning about what we hear and believe. In 1908, he wrote: "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners, whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing." His advice on both subjects is valid. Have all of us not violated the commandment "thou shalt not bear false witness" sometime in our lives?

Despite the human inclination to lie, should we not question for ourselves and learn the truth not only about our religious teachings but also about those seeking our vote in the political arena? Aren't we responsible to ferret out the truth as we prepare to cast our ballot? In that way, religion and politics converge. It is our duty to question the accuracy of human beings, if there is doubt about what clergy preach or what candidates exhort in their speeches. Judaism has an ancient proverb which says, "God created everything except the art of lying." If God sees into the hearts of human beings, is it not incumbent upon us to use our best judgment to discern whether someone, whether he or she is running for elected office or preaching from Holy Scriptures, is telling us the truth? Is this not faith in action, too?

Places of Worship in the Lowcountry. Includes advertisements for St. Francis by the Sea Catholic Church, Bluffton United Methodist Church, Congregation Beth Yam, Holy Family Catholic Church, First Presbyterian Church, St. Luke's Church, Anglican Church of the Redeemer, Sea Island Chapel, and Providence Presbyterian Church.

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