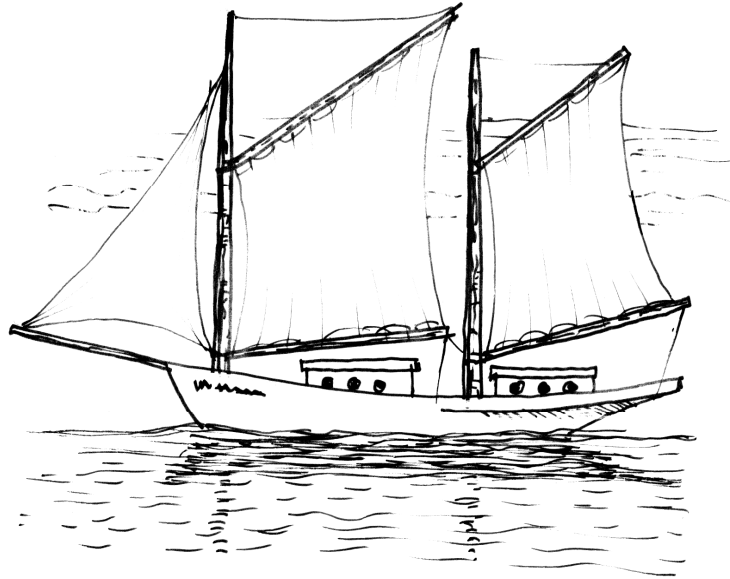


# Peter Ambuofa

## Part 2



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“Is that you, Ambuofa?” asked his mother. His three years in Queensland had changed his appearance. His hair was close-cropped instead of being wild and shaggy and his face had a new expression inspired by God’s Spirit in him.

“What are you doing here?” they asked. “We hear you bring some strange stories. Who is this person you talk about?”

Peter began to tell them. “I am a voice of Jesus.” but the new ideas were meaningless to the parents who simply wanted their son to return with them to their mountain village.

His mother took a piece of cooked taro from the basket she carried. “Son,” she said, “come back with us to the village. This taro is your food, but if you don’t come back with us you’ll die of hunger.”

Peter slowly shook his head. He desperately wanted to be with his family again but he couldn’t go back to the old godless ways. His mother put the yam back in the basket, giving Peter nothing. He recognised this as a sign that they rejected him from the family unless he turned his back on his new way of life and came back to the village with them. Peter remained steadfast. “I can’t change back to the old ways. The new Christian way is better for all of us.” he told his parents. Sadly he watched, with a heavy heart, as his parents climbed back up the mountain track without him.

The three remained at the beach for a few days, until the families of the other two heard they had returned and persuaded them both to go back to the village. Peter was left alone with very little food. Soon, he was joined by two of the four boys they had met on the beach when they first returned from Queensland. Now there were three people to feed and practically no food to eat, for there were few trees in the beach area.

“Lord, we have no food to eat here. Help us to find food, please.” he prayed desperately.

Looking up, he noticed a gnarled old tree called a nwanwa’o, with seed fruits on it. He picked the seeds and cooked them over a fire in a section of bamboo and all three ate the food. This tree continued to bear fruit for the next six months, which was a miracle, for this tree would not normally bear both immature and ripe fruit at the same time or for so long a time.

“The first ting we must do is to make a food garden,” Peter told the boys. “The soil up the hill a little way over there is better.”

They set to work with digging sticks to prepare the garden. An old woman gave them some plants, taro, yams and young banana shoots. After six months they were able to harvest the first food from their garden. One day, soon after their first harvest, Peter went to the nwanwa’o tree looking for fruit, but there was none. “Heavenly Father, you kept the nwanwa’o tree bearing fruit for as long as we needed it, but now we have our taro and yam we don’t need it. Thank you Father for providing the fruit. This is one of your miracles.”

Once the food garden was established Peter ventured to climb the mountain track to visit his people. When he told them the good news of Jesus one of his brothers and another boy came to Peter. “We want to know more of this Jesus story. Can we come back and live with you so we can hear more about it?”

Peter was delighted. “Of course you can. We can put up another bush house and make more food gardens. We would be pleased for you to join us.”

Peter was not particularly good at reading and writing, but he certainly had God’s word and life in his heart. He now had four boys to teach the Christian way. Often he thought about Miss Young and the teachers she appointed to the sugar plantations. “I wish she could send someone here to help us,” he thought.

One day they noticed a ship sailing into the harbour, bringing back labourers who had served their three years on the plantations. Quickly Peter sprang into his canoe and paddled at full speed to the lugger. As the men disembarked, he climbed up on deck, looking around for something to write on. This was his chance to send a message to Miss Young. He picked up an old hessian sack that had been tossed into a corner, chewed some betel nut to produce red ink’, and wrote with his finger on the sack, “Come, help me. Peter Ambuofa.

Tying it up with a length of bush string he handed it to a labourer who was boarding the lugger, returning to work in Queensland, with the request, "Would you please give this to Miss Young at Fairymead?" A thousand miles away and passed from hand to hand, who knows how, the message eventually reached Florence Young and her friends of the Queensland Kanaka Mission.

"What can we do about this?" they asked themselves, "It all seems too big and impossible for us"

Meanwhile Peter continued at the beach-side village at Malu'u, faithfully teaching his four disciples. One day he went up to a mountain village where a heathen feast was in progress.

"Let me sing for you," he asked the village leader. Peter sang "Jesus loves me" which he had translated into the local language, and then told them the story of Jesus. The village people listened attentively.

Next day a young lad came down the mountain to Peter, saying, "I heard you sing that song yesterday, and I've come to stay with you to learn more about Jesus."

"You're welcome to stay and learn with us," replied a smiling Peter. "We want you to know Jesus and to tell the other village people about Him."

Then a tragedy happened. Peter's young brother, who had been living with him to learn the Christian way, suddenly died.

"You've brought white man's devils to kill our young brother. We'll kill you for this." the older brothers threatened. Peter knew they meant what they said and was always on the alert, watching out for danger. But Peter's life was preserved time and again. Several times, as he was going to sleep at night, the thought came to him, "I won't sleep there tonight, I'll move to the other side of the house." Sure enough, a spear was thrust through the coconut leaf wall but failed to hit the target, for Peter had moved his sleeping mats. Several times men lay in ambush on the mountain track to catch and kill him, but on those occasions Peter had decided to go by a different track.

One night armed bushmen crept up near his hut, spears and clubs in hand, prepared to kill him.

"What's that bright light in the hut?" they said as they drew near.

"I don't know what it is but I'm scared," replied another, "I'm not staying here." And they all fled off through the bush back to their village to tell of the amazing thing they had seen. God's angels had once again preserved Peter's life.

Another time, Peter was planting taro when a group of village men, armed with muskets, crept up behind him, preparing to shoot. But heavy rain wet the gunpowder and once again Peter's life was spared.

“Peter’s God must be very powerful,” they decided as they talked together in the villages.

Peter faithfully continued sharing the gospel with those around him who would listen. For four years there was not a lot to encourage him. Then there was a drought. The mountain village people watched their food gardens die off without rain, while Peter’s garden flourished and provided all the food they needed. The villagers discussed the situation, “Peter’s God must be great if He can make his garden grow in a drought,” said one.

“And He protects Peter from us when we try to kill him.” observed another.

“Perhaps we should send someone down to learn about Peter’s God,” suggested a village leader.

“We’d better send the women and children down,” said another. “After all, they’re only women; it won’t matter if any harm comes to them.”

So they chose some of the women and children to go down to the coastal village to learn from Peter.

Some little time later, the cry echoed around the Malu’u settlement, “There’s a ship coming in to the harbour!” Everyone rushed down to the beach to see who would be on the ship returning from Australia this time. They watched eagerly as the lugger drew as near to the shore as possible.

The small boat was lowered over the side and several Malaitan men joined the ship’s master as they rowed to the shore.

“That looks like our friends Silas Dindi and Charlie Lofea. It will be great to have them back,” cried Peter who was rushing to the water’s edge to welcome his old friends. Silas and Charlie were shown around the little settlement which had grown around Peter’s work. By now there were several bush material houses, and productive food gardens. Peter showed Charlie and Silas around their village.

“Will you stay and help me, my friends? I need help teaching these people, and you have just come back from Australia where you learnt the Bible from Miss Young.”

Charlie and Silas gladly agreed.

“Peter,” they said, “You have done a great work for God here all by yourself. We will be very pleased to stay and work with you.”

Other Christian men returned and joined Peter and his friends in praying for Malaita, that the day would soon come when all Malaitans would be Christian. Charles Pillans, who was working with the Queensland Kanaka Mission on a plantation in Queensland felt God was calling him to go to Malaita to help Peter. But his health suffered in the Solomons due to malaria and difficult living conditions, and after only a few months he died.

Two years later Frederick Schweiger arrived with the intention of continuing Charles Pillans' work, but he died at Malu'u and his companion became seriously ill, so returned home.

Then in 1900 the new Australian Federal Government passed a law which changed the thinking of the mission. It stated, "*All labourers imported from the islands are to be returned to their homes by 1906. No more labourers are to be recruited.*"

When the Young family and other supporters of the Queensland Kanaka Mission heard this they discussed the matter together.

"This means we won't have any labourers to teach in five years." stated Mr. Young.

"Maybe God is telling us to respond to Peter Ambuofa's calls for help." suggested his brother.

For months they prayed about it then finally decided that they should establish a mission in the Solomons and that a team should visit the islands to investigate the situation.

The first party to visit Malaita consisted of Florence Young, her friend Mrs. Fricke, and three men newly appointed as missionaries. They came well prepared, with six months' supplies, a pre-fabricated house and a ten-ton ketch named "*Daphne*", specially built for travel around the reef-encircled islands. They travelled by the steamer *S.S.Moresby* to Gavutu, a trading and watering station, in sight of the island of Malaita, with its high mountains stretching down its hundred-mile spine.

Here they disembarked and prepared the *Daphne* for their venture into the Eastern Solomons, particularly Malaita. But it was not all plain sailing. At Gavutu the British Resident Commissioner met with the mission party.

"Yes, Miss Young," he said politely, "I know I gave you permission to travel into the Malaita area when I met you in Sydney. But I really don't think it's wise for you and Mrs. Fricke to go any further. You'll both have to return to Sydney. I made a mistake telling you I would allow you to come."

"But you promised," cried Florence desperately, "You must let us continue our journey as we planned, both of us. If you send Mrs. Fricke back I will be left travelling alone with three men, and that's not right."

Florence persisted and the Commissioner finally and reluctantly gave in allowing both women to continue the journey. Setting off on the *Daphne* with a fair wind in their favour, they came to Langa Langa lagoon at the southern end of Malaita later the same day. There for the first time they saw the man-made islands which were home to large numbers of 'salt-water people'. These islets were built up on the floor of the lagoon. Large boulders of coral rock were gathered and loaded on to rafts, then placed in position on the shallow reef, building up a mound of rocks until it was well above high tide level, sand filling the spaces between the rocks. Then houses were built on top of the mounds. They couldn't grow food gardens there so every three days the 'salt water people' brought fish, crabs and shellfish to the shore of the main island to trade with the 'mountain people' who brought yams, taro, coconuts and fruit. The party in the *Daphne* visited several such islands as they headed north-west up the West Coast of Malaita.

The next day, about noon, they sighted a large canoe coming towards them.

"Are they friends or not?" they wondered.

As they drew near someone observed, "They're wearing shirts and trousers, they must be friends who have been in Australia "

"Let's signal to them that we're their friends. Let's sing a song they'll know."

So the strains of "O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise." rang out across the water. What a thrill it was to hear the response from the men in the canoe as they joined in the familiar hymn.

"We've come from Malu'u this morning," explained one of the Malaitans when they met and the canoe pulled along-side. "We're taking this food to our brothers in the Christian village down the coast. It's new and their gardens aren't ready for harvesting yet so we are helping them out with food until their gardens are ready."

The people on the *Daphne* looked into the canoe and were impressed with the amount of food, taro, yams, bananas and coconuts they carried in coconut leaf baskets in the bottom of the canoe.

"We're very happy to welcome you to our island," said another man. "We're really very proud to be the first ones to greet you "

After a short chat they separated and each went their way. Later in the day the *Daphne* sailed into the bay and anchored off the white sandy beach near Malu'u. They could see and hear the great excitement as word spread that the ship had arrived. The visitors came ashore in their dinghy to be warmly welcomed by a crowd of young people all eager to shake hands with them.

Then they met Peter Ambuofa, with his wife and little daughter. They listened in amazement as Peter told them of all the Lord had done during his ten years there. His parents and four of his brothers had become Christians; only one brother would still not believe in Jesus, God's Son. Many others came for teaching. On Sundays there were around two hundred at the worship and teaching meetings.

“God has been very good to us here. It was very hard at first when so many were against me and against God, but He looked after us and provided the food we needed. We thank Him for His goodness. And I want to thank you, my friends, for coming to visit us. It is a great encouragement to see you here.”

“Peter, you’re such an encouragement to us,” Florence Young replied, “When I started those classes back at Fairymead I had no idea how they would grow, but God expanded the mission far beyond what I expected. Now, we’ve come out to you here and we have two men who are willing to come back and stay with you to help with the Bible teaching here at Malu’u, if you would like them to.”

“Miss Young, that would be the answer to my prayers I’ve prayed for a long time. It will be wonderful to have their help.” responded Peter, his eyes full of tears.

The missionary party had planned to continue their journey down the east coast of Malaita on their way back to Gavutu, but they were all suffering serious bouts of malaria. They needed crew to help them with the *Daphne*, as the mission men were too ill to do anything, so they took on some ‘salt-water people’ as crew. The night before their departure Florence could not sleep so she spent the time praying for guidance, not knowing why she was feeling so disturbed in spirit.

The next morning Charlie Lofia came to Florence. “You know those Ata’a men you signed on as crew?” he began. “Last night I heard them talking. I understand their language a little bit and they were planning to run your boat on to the reef and then kill you all and rob the ship.”

Florence Young listened attentively, beginning to realise why she had been kept awake during the night to pray.

Charlie continued, “Miss Young, last night God spoke to me and said, “Charlie, you go on board and look after Miss Young. And take your friend Johnny with you.”

“Charlie, I’m very grateful to you. Yes, we’ll sign you on as crew as well as Johnny.” Both these were ‘mountain men’ with no knowledge of the sea, but they were trustworthy men who would take care of the mission party.

The trip down the east coast of Malaita was cancelled and the *Daphne* set sail for Gavutu with all five missionaries lying in the open boat suffering from malaria, exposed to the burning tropical sun. The winds were very light, or non-existent, so several times they were becalmed and lay rocking helplessly on the flat sea. The nightmare trip ended at last and they were never happier to land on shore at Gavutu. They spent several weeks there recovering and waiting for a ship to take Florence and Mrs. Fricke back to Australia. When it finally came, the ship’s doctor also ordered Mr. Thomas back home as he was too ill to stay.

The remaining two men began to plan how they would establish centres on the island, but they struck unexpected difficulties from the local people. Those who had spent time in Queensland had seen how the white man had taken Australian Aboriginal land without their consent and claimed it for their own. They were afraid they would be treated the same way, so it took many months of negotiating with Peter and other tribal elders before they were able to put up bush material buildings at Malu'u for residence and for school and worship.

Next was Nongosila on the east coast of Malaita and a year after it had arrived at Gavutu, the pre-fabricated building was brought to One Pusu on the south west coast and erected there as part of the head station for the mission, chosen for its convenient central position.

Peter paused one day as he climbed the steep hill. Now there were steps carved into the hillside and a road for easier access to the Christian village. All of this work had been done by the willing helpers at the village. He looked up the hill and could see the buildings erected in recent months. Nearby were the food gardens with healthy looking crops promising a good harvest. Around the houses were fruit trees and brightly coloured plants, all reflecting the joy and happiness of the residents.

“What a long way we’ve come,” Peter thought as his mind went back to his solitary existence on the beach, the many times his life had been threatened, the times when food was scarce. But then he remembered too the goodness of his God who had delivered him out of all his troubles, had provided food miraculously, and had saved his life many times. He thought of the numbers of people who had become Christians and been baptised in recent years. Then there were the eleven young trainees who had recently gone to One Pusu to share in the task of setting up the new station there.

“My God,” prayed Peter, “You have done so many good things. Thank You for all your great mercies and goodness.”

Adapted from:

*Pearls from the Pacific*, Florence S.H.Young, Marshall Bros., London  
*Fire in the Islands*, Alison Griffiths, Harold Shaw Pub.,Wheaton, Illinois,

*Footsteps in the Sea*, John Garret, Institute of Pacific Studies, U.S.P., Suva, Fiji