What to do about pornography?

Do you like sex? If you're a healthy adult, chances are you do. But like all good things, the devil has done a terrible job destroying something that is wonderful and good. And there's no place that is more visible than on the Internet. Whether we're baby boomers, gen x's, gen y's or, very sadly, millennials – we're all living in generation XXX. Mobile phones sold in some nations in our region come preloaded with porn, one in four Internet searches are for pornography, and the age of children exposed to graphic images has dramatically declined.

If it was only out there somewhere, maybe we wouldn't have to worry. But it's not. It's right here within the church. In fact, it might be right on the computer where you're reading this note. And the recent Value Genesis study found a shockingly high percentage of Adventist students in both Australia and the nations of the Pacific viewed some explicit sexual material within the year, and around 10 percent viewed pornography over 40 times a year. And it isn't just students—according to a number of reports, porn is a growing problem among Christian adults - and even clergy.

What to do? Let's begin by talking honestly about the problem and how Christ can give us victory. And that is exactly what Graham Hood does in A porn addict's journey, where he provides practical, candid, Christ–centered advice, as well as
some tips on how to help those you love who get caught up in the web.

Also:

- Feeling nostalgic? Classic Adventist album launched today
- Prayer summit mobilises young people
- It's all about Jesus, at local The One Project
- Former RECORD editor dies

University to mentor Avondale with milestone MoU

The signing of a memorandum of understanding between Charles Sturt University and Avondale College of Higher Education this week, should help the latter seek self-accrediting status.

ADRA's response to the 'PNG solution'

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia does not support the Australian Government's Papua New Guinea solution.

Read RECORD

A new month, a new Sabbath, a new RECORD. How sweet it is!

Watch/download InFocus

Watch this week's Christian news bulletin, as well as commentary on Australia's asylum seeker situation and
Coffins and choppers (web exclusive)

In this RECORD.net.au exclusive content, Michelle Abel witnesses the irony of a country that is rapidly being developed and modernised but still struggles with basic health needs.

*Are you a vegan and loving your diet? Did you give the vegan diet a go but ditched it? Well, RECORD assistant editor Kent Kingston would like to hear from you. Email your stories to kentkingston@record.net.au.

a special interview with Jean Gersbach, whose missionary husband was brutally murdered in Solomon Islands ten years ago. Is forgiveness and peace possible?

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My name is Graham. I am a believer in Jesus Christ. And I struggle with porn addiction.

Some of you already know that as I wrote “Lonely Men Watch Porn” in the RECORD a couple of years ago, and I’ve presented on the issue in a number of churches. You may have understood from my testimony that I have had total victory over porn. This is not completely true.

A little while ago, after I slipped and viewed pornography, I was scheduled to give my testimony. I felt like a hypocrite as I stood extolling the virtues of a Christ-centred recovery from sin when I had myself only just fallen. As I gave my testimony, God was telling me in no uncertain terms that He wanted me to tell the real story; but I couldn’t. Why? Because in the audience was the woman who saved my life and my reason for still living—my beautiful wife, Michelle. While I had shared my fall with one of the people in my accountability team, I had not told her, and I was not going to blurt it out in front of an audience, no matter how small.

The program ended and it was the next week when a woman contacted me for help with her porn addiction. I told her that I only had these conversations with women when my wife was present and asked permission to put her on speaker. She agreed and Michelle and I worked with her to help her understand her issues. When the conversation ended, Michelle hugged me and said, “You’re my hero.” I started to cry and she asked me what was wrong. I was filled with dread as I pondered my next words. This wonderful woman had trusted me above all other men in her life and I was about to reveal something that could destroy that trust.

She sat on my knee and asked me what was wrong. With a deep and nervous breath I found the courage to tell her that I had recently slipped back into porn.

She looked into my eyes and stroked my hair. Tears started to build in her eyes and she took a breath and said, “Oh sweetheart are you OK?” I replied that I wasn’t OK and felt like a dog. She continued to stroke my hair and dry my tears and then she asked me if it was anything she had done to cause my fall. I was stunned by her response—it was the opposite to what I had expected. She then went on to ask me if there was anything at all she could do to make me feel better.

This was totally unexpected and as I looked into her face I saw the face of Jesus. Then she said something that I will never forget: “You are more my hero now than you have ever been.” We then made a pact that I would make her my first call if I looked like stumbling again. She asked me if I had ever fallen before in the seven years we had been together. I confessed that I fell about once a year.

I want everyone to understand the magnitude of what happened:

- God made it clear that without hearing His voice I would be lost.
- God showed me how this fall had restricted me as a man and my ministry.
God created an environment that challenged me to the truth.
He gave Michelle the courage and the good sense to see this for what it was and give me the best support possible.
He wanted us to use this experience to help others.
He showed me an opportunity to understand where Satan had tripped me.
He showed us how we should respond to others who fall.

From our experience, I believe we have insight into the way God would like us to act if our partner struggles with porn addiction, and falls:

- First, it is not about or because of you that your partner has fallen.
- Second, the person who has fallen already feels wretched and miserable from the fall, and the last thing he or she needs is to have the person they love most add to that feeling.
- Third, your partner has probably been living with and trying to battle the addiction since he or she was a child.
- Fourth, it may take a lifetime to beat the addiction. That does not mean that we throw those afflicted on the scrap heap. They need your support in ways that you might expect if it were you in their shoes.

Michelle’s response to me was a Jesus response. In our ministry we encourage those who seek our support to understand that we are at war with evil; that there are only two sides from which to choose. We ask them which side they would like to be on and then encourage them to make that choice in their daily lives by asking what would Jesus do (WWJD)?

Michelle’s response has made me stronger than I have ever been in my battle with porn. I have not so much as had a lustful thought since we had that conversation. Why? Because I saw Jesus in my wife and I felt comforted.

In Matthew 5 Jesus tells us in His own words: "Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted." We don’t have to get rid of the internet and put blocks on computers. That's not the answer. We must allow Christ to condition us for our journey into a sin-filled world. His blood will teflon coat us and make us impervious to the stain of repetitive sin.

I’ve been afflicted with this sin for more than four decades. As with all addictions, some people can give them up easier than others. Generally, there is no easy fix. Satan will always use your sin of choice as an entry point when you’re down and out for the count.

Forgiveness and support to those addicted to pornography is not a cakewalk for spouses. It brings home all of their insecurities and can make spouses feel worthless when their life partner reveals the truth about a failure. I know this well, as I am still coming to terms with what my addiction has cost my family. But if the man in your life is struggling with pornography addiction then know this: he is wired to be a hero and anything that makes him feel less than that only makes the situation worse. There is hope for families where a partner is struggling with pornography, and that hope begins with the kind of love that only Jesus can inspire.

Graham Hood and his wife, Michelle, run Mission Serenity, based on the Gold Coast, Queensland.
Psalter re-releases historic albums

An iconic Adventist album from the 1970s has been re-released by Psalter Music after being digitally restored and remastered.

Robert Wolfgramm’s “Refugee” (originally released under the title “Bob”) was launched on August 1 and is the first title in the Psalter Classics series.

Psalter manager Dale Willis is excited about the project. “This series features music that was iconic within the church music scene and its fringes at the time, and provides a nostalgic insight into some of the musicians, groups and songwriters who lived through it, spreading the Gospel through song,” he said.

“All My Friends Are Sinners”, originally released by the Galilee record label, will be released on September 1. Other albums originally under the Adventist Radio and Television label are due for release later this year.

Visit [www.psaltermusic.com/albums](http://www.psaltermusic.com/albums)
Adelaide, South Australia

Despite the cold winter weather, over 200 youth from across Australia gathered for the Adventist Youth for Christ (AYC) re:dedication Prayer Summit in Adelaide from July 19 to 21.

Featuring Jerry and Janet Page from the General Conference’s Ministerial Department as keynote speakers, delegates were inspired by testimonies of answered prayer and engaged in interactive workshops and discussions surrounding personal and corporate prayer.

A highlight of the event was the unique Sabbath program. Comprising of prayer and fasting as well as individual and small group conversational prayer sessions, more than 20 people rededicated their lives to God in service, with many others putting their hand up for Bible work or full time ministry. The afternoon comprised a practical outreach session spent praying with members of the surrounding community followed by an uplifting musical worship service titled “Prayer in Song”.

Participants were also inspired to incorporate prayer into every facet of their lives—from our own personal walk with Jesus to making prayer the core of youth groups and local churches.

The re:dedicate Prayer Summit forms one of the key parts of AYC’s re:mobilise vision. Born out of a desire to unite Australia’s youth in a lifestyle of evangelism, re:mobilise provides a comprehensive and dynamic opportunity for young people to be involved in an evangelistic cycle of sowing, training, harvesting and discipleship, and to join the world church’s effort in the 2014 Year of Evangelism.

The strategic plan is based on a pilot project titled iMPACT 2012, where 11 different churches around Australia hosted youth-run, youth-led public evangelistic series in 2012. The combined efforts saw tremendous impact not only on surrounding communities but have transformed the youth themselves into active disciples for Christ.

Thus, a similar but larger project—iMPACT 2014—forms the cornerstone of AYC’s vision. The concept is simple; under the guidance of Pastor Geoff Youlden, Australian Union Conference evangelist, AYC spends 2013 in prayer, preparation and training. 2014 will then see AYC provide shared resources, marketing and the momentum of a nationwide, multi-site evangelism for effective, local church-based youth mission, followed by discipleship and follow-up efforts in 2015.

AYC organisers described the weekend in Adelaide as "a mountain-top experience", and acknowledged the challenges that lie ahead. Further prayer relay events and evangelistic training are planned around the country for 2013, culminating in the re:volution Convention from February 13 to 16 next year in Melbourne, which will serve as a precursor to the iMPACT 2014 public evangelistic series.
Newcastle, New South Wales

In its second local gathering, the One Project added a more Australian flavour to the Jesus-focus that has caught Adventist attention around the world. Meeting at Newcastle’s City Hall, 360 church members and leaders from across Australia and New Zealand spent two days—July 20 and 21—discussing Jesus and His call on their lives and their church. Conversation groups, worship, prayer and preaching, culminating in a simple communion service, invited participants to discover, celebrate, share and experience Jesus in renewed ways.

“This has been one of the most locally visioned and led One Project gatherings,” says Dr Lisa Clark Diller, One Project board member, speaker and professor of history at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee (USA). “The location, Australian speakers, even the table decorations and food, reflected this community—and that had an impact on the conversations and relationships that happened here.”

The weekend marked the third anniversary of the first meeting of a small group of Adventist youth pastors and university chaplains, from which grew the One Project, with annual gatherings now established on four continents. So many other people have resonated with the impulse to re-focus on Jesus that, for example, the Newcastle gathering was booked out some three months in advance.

Yet, for the One Project leadership, their personal experience remains core to this ministry. “In these three years, I have changed a lot in my life,” reflects Pastor Japhet de Oliveira, co-chair of the One Project and chaplain at Andrews University in Michigan (USA), of which the One Project is an official ministry. “I am recording my life, wanting to see a healthy progression in my life and faith. And I have seen it happen in the personal and work lives of each of our team members. It is from this that we speak. I want to make sure that we are bringing people to Jesus and allowing that to change them and build the church.”

This Jesus-focussed enthusiasm has drawn others into the wider One Project team, including Newcastle’s Joanna Darby who was one of the local preachers and with her husband, Leighton, did much of the local organising of the event. “When we experienced our first One Project, we were so inspired by it we wanted to share it with the people in our conference,” she reflects. “We are excited about the cross-generational interactions—church leaders and young people sitting together to talk about Jesus and what it means for our church. It was also important to have some local presenters and to be included among such fabulous preachers was a great honour.”

Director of youth ministries for the North New South Wales Conferences, Pastor Jeff Parker agrees that it was a privilege for his conference to host the One Project this year. “People who attended found it amazing and inspiring, and have said it’s challenged them to think about so many things,” he says.

Pastor Brendan Pratt, a departmental director for the Greater Sydney Conference, and Pastor Eddie Hypolite, senior pastor of the Avondale College Church and a co-founder of the One Project, were the other Australian-based preachers. “There was something almost prophetic about who Jesus is to our church and who Jesus really should be,” Pastor Hypolite says of the preaching at the Newcastle gathering. “Three years on from the very first meeting, our voices had a clear ring—it felt like Jesus came back for the anniversary.”
He says that his work in a local church has given him the opportunity to develop what the One Project’s theme—"Jesus. All."—looks like. “The One Project is the theory but our local church is where we do the practice,” he explains.

Pastor de Oliveira says the Newcastle event will influence other One Project gatherings around the world. “The Newcastle team has been incredible,” he says. “Every element of the program was taken to a higher level.

“We don’t have a monopoly on this conversation about Jesus—but we do believe this is an important conversation. We believe we are called to fall in love with Jesus and to be changed by that. But we have a lot still to learn and I am looking forward to it.”

Two One Project events are planned for Australia next year—in Sydney (July 19–20) and Perth (July 26–27). More information is available at <www.the1project.org>.
Former RECORD editor dies

Cooranbong, New South Wales

Former RECORD editor Pastor Robert Parr passed away yesterday at the Avondale Retirement Village in Cooranbong, New South Wales. He was 93.

Pastor Parr’s daughter, Jenny, made the announcement today via her Facebook account. She said her father had been in the retirement village for six years following a series of strokes.

“I was able to see him and be with him for his last two days,” said Jenny. “Many had been blessed by his ministry, his writing, and his teaching. He will be remembered by many for his sense of humour, his love of music, his way with words and his enjoyment of golf.”

Messages of support have flooded Jenny's Facebook page.

“Robert Parr was one of our greatest,” said Pastor John Hammond. “Lightning witted and a courageous MAN OF GOD. Vale Bob.”

“Ah, Bob, you've left huge shoes to fill in gospel ministry,” said Dr Grenville Kent. “The wit, the flow of language, the intellectual fireworks, the warmth and love for people combined with teasing and gruff crustiness, the drive for excellence, the work ethic. What a champ.”

Pastor Parr served as editor of RECORD and Signs of the Times from 1967 to 1980. Pastor Bruce Manners spoke of Pastor Parr’s contributions to the South Pacific Division’s official magazine in his thesis Publish or perish—a study of the role of print in the Adventist community (see below for excerpt).

Following his tenure with RECORD, Pastor Parr was called to the position of president for the Greater Sydney Conference—a role in which he served for five years. Even after retiring from full-time ministry, he continued to pastor a number of churches and was actively involved in prison ministry.

Pastor Parr is survived by his wife, Fern, his three daughters, Jenny, Mareta and Roslyn, and his nine grandchildren.

A funeral service for Pastor Parr will be held at 11 am on Monday, August 11, at Avondale Cemetery in Cooranbong.
Robert Parr is perhaps the only Record editor to have had editorial experience outside the church. He edited academic books for some seven years for the Packer publishing conglomerate in Sydney before being appointed to head the editorial work at Signs Publishing Company. A former Adventist school and Sydney Grammar School teacher, he was a regular contributor to church publications before his appointment. At the time of his appointment, Record was partly produced at the church's headquarters in Sydney by a retired minister. Parr offered to "look after it," an offer that was accepted.

Record of the time merely reported material sent in from churches and given to it by church leaders. Parr (2000) suggests that there was not a lot of creativity or innovation coming from "chaps in high places... So I just went back into my shell and tried to keep it afloat and tried to brighten it up a bit." He introduced an editorial of more substance than previously and he also included his own style of writing which was "brighter than some." "Brighter than some" is a modest assessment. In reality, his force of personality and the inclusion of humour, particularly with his back page news notes, made Record a must read for many church members. Subscriptions increased under his tenure until it became free for all church members. In his editorial techniques there was little editing of articles except to correct errors of logic or grammar. He was also hamstrung by the expectation that anything sent in would be published. However, this added to the effect that it was like a letter from home that shared even the inconsequential and the gossip among friends. More than any editor before or since, Parr developed a strong personal following as he developed a chatty, inclusive style in Record that carried the magazine despite some of the other content.

His approach was what would be called conservative, at least by today's standards. However, his style gave popular appeal to Record that drew in more readers while maintaining support for the church's core values and lifestyle positions. Beginning the role as a "lay person" (he had been out of church employ for about 14 years) he expected to be given some guidelines. In fact, there were none and few contacts from church administration, "But you knew that Big Brother was watching you, and you didn't [do things] that might rock the boat" (Parr, 2000).
The signing of a memorandum of understanding between Charles Sturt University and Avondale College of higher education should help the latter seek self-accrediting status.

A ceremony at Avondale, July 31, formalised Charles Sturt University’s role as a mentor and advisor to the Cooranbong-based college of higher education. The role will primarily include assessing and benchmarking Avondale’s governance, learning and teaching and research quality and standards and sharing resources on a cost-for-services basis.

“Avondale has a long tradition of providing quality education and programs,” says Charles Sturt’s vice-chancellor and president Professor Andrew Vann, adding that many of the programs, particularly in business, the creative arts, education, nursing, science and mathematics and theology, are similar to those at the university. “Its mission and activities resonate with our values and priorities.” In his speech during the ceremony, Andrew referred to the mottos—“For the public good” and “For a greater vision of world needs”—of both entities as having “gumption” and “soul.”

Established by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1897, Avondale offers undergraduate, postgraduate and vocational courses that “seek to develop the whole person,” says president Professor Ray Roennfeldt. The philosophy appeals to students, who, according to The Good Universities Guide 2013, continue to give Avondale one of the highest “educational experience” ratings in the country. Almost 1400—a record—are enrolled this year.

The memorandum could mean the students receive dual-badged testamurs and have their degrees recognised as if they were Charles Sturt degrees. Students may also enrol in any units of study, including majors and minors, with Charles Sturt if the courses are not offered by Avondale. “Avondale will always offer a defined number of courses, but the course and unit options for our students may increase through online study at Charles Sturt,” said Professor Roennfeldt. Staff members will find it easier to collaborate with their Charles Sturt colleagues in research and research degree supervision and in teaching exchanges.

“However, it’s not as if Avondale is bringing nothing to the relationship,” said Professor Roennfeldt. He notes how students at Charles Sturt may also enrol in Avondale’s courses, “which will give them access to our service learning opportunities.” This and the collaboration between staff members should build relationships between Charles Sturt and other Adventist Church entities, such as Sydney Adventist Hospital—at which Avondale will negotiate clinical places for Charles Sturt allied health students.
Charles Sturt has demonstrated its commitment to the relationship by nominating its deputy vice-chancellor and vice-president (academic) Professor Garry Marchant to sit as an external member of Avondale’s Academic Board.

In her first visit to campus, mayor of Lake Macquarie Jodie Harrison spoke of how Avondale’s journey to university status will help as the city diversifies its employment base—nine per cent of jobs in Lake Macquarie are in education and training, but the sector is forecast to grow at a higher than average rate. She noted other benefits, too, including reversing the trend of young adults leaving the city to further their education. A university campus will help “develop the skills for the future of our economy, connect us to national and international ideas and knowledge, serve as a catalyst for innovation and make a substantial contribution to our cultural and civic life,” she said.

The memorandum is not legally binding but is valid for five years, although Avondale and Charles Sturt can extend—in duration and scope—or suspend it by mutual agreement. It “maps the big picture,” said Professor Roennfeldt during his speech. “It means we’re proactively seeking opportunities for cooperation and benefit. Let the journey begin.”
ADRA's response to the 'PNG Solution' by The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia does not support the Australian Government’s ‘Papua New Guinea Solution’. We believe the plan lacks compassion, is inequitable and unjust—and puts at risk the lives and livelihoods of thousands of vulnerable asylum seekers and Papua New Guinean locals.

As the debate continues around ‘the Solution’—and equally harsh policies continue to be tabled by opposition parties—we would like to highlight a number of facts often muddied in the political debate:

- On July 19, the Australian Government announced a change in policy that will see all asylum seekers arriving in Australia by boat, detained on Manus Island, PNG.
- No asylum seeker arriving by boat will have any chance of settling in Australia—rather, they will be resettled in Papua New Guinea, returned to their home country, resettled in a third country—or remain in detention on Manus Island, potentially indefinitely.
- Papua New Guinea is amongst the least developed countries in the world—ranking in the bottom 16 per cent of the United Nations’ Human Development Index (156 out of 186). Australia is ranked 2nd highest in the world (source: United Nations Development Programme).
- The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) describes PNG as having social indicators ‘among the worst in the Asia Pacific’, noting that ‘poverty, unemployment and poor governance contribute to serious law and order problems’ (source: ausaid.gov.au).
- Australia ranks 62nd in the world on the number of refugees accommodated on a per capita basis—and 87th relative to national wealth (source: Refugee Council of Australia).
- In 2012 Australia gave refugee protection to 8367 asylum seekers and resettled 5937 refugees from other countries—just 0.99% of the 1,450,394 refugees resettled globally during 2012 (source: Refugee Council of Australia).
- The United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR) has warned Australia, who is a signatory to the Refugee Convention, that recent policy changes could breach international law and its human rights obligations (read more of their concerns at unhcr.org).

Asylum seekers, by their very nature are vulnerable—victims of great disadvantage, poverty and/or violence. These are peoples that include Iranians fleeing one of the world's most repressive regimes; Iraqi Christians persecuted since the west’s invasion; Syrians caught in a murderous civil war; and, the Hazara minority fleeing targeted violence in Afghanistan.

Without a doubt these people are amongst ‘the least of these’ we are called to care for (Matthew 25:40). And this, our chance, to be modern day good Samaritans (Luke 10:25-37) and take care of those in need entering our land.
The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia believes that all people were created equal by God. And that our biblical mandate as Christians is to love selflessly, to act compassionately and to seek justice for all (Micah 6:8).

As such, we do not support the change in policy recently undertaken by the Australian government. Further, we fully support the position put forward by the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID) that current policy not only places ‘desperate people into an untenable situation’, but, as a result of the as-yet detailed changes to the aid program, could also compromise current, life-changing programs in Papua New Guinea and beyond.

We call on all Australian political parties to seek an equitable, compassionate and humanitarian approach to the processing and resettlement of refugees—and to clarify what impact these policies would have on current aid budgets and programming.

We encourage you to use your voice to repeat this call. Forward this email, write to your local MP and speak against the issue with your colleagues and friends. For further details and commentary follow our blog and Facebook page.
I am waiting in the shade at Daru provincial airport, Western Province. I am on my way to Kiunga—imagine a map of PNG and Irian Jiya (West Papua), put a finger at a point right about in the middle. That’s Kiunga. To the south of Daru is the northern tip of Australia, only a few hours by boat. To the north, up past Kiunga, is the Ok Tedi gold and copper mine. Western Province is home to PNG richest mines, and to some of its poorest communities.

While the plane is refuelled cargo is unloaded and moved to a bench next to me. A huge, heavy piece is hoisted over by four men. Only when it is placed down carefully and the men move away do I realise it is a coffin, wrapped in black plastic. Next to the coffin are piled white boxes of medical equipment, all labelled for the TB department at the provincial hospital. The plane also brought in the daily newspapers, which are sitting in a pile at the head of the coffin. Some people can’t wait, and walk up to the vendor to buy a paper immediately. The newspaper vendor cuts the tape holding them all together and starts accepting money.

Tuberculosis (TB) is a deadly yet curable disease which thrives on poverty and overcrowding. By some estimates TB is already PNG’s deadliest infectious disease. Since new equipment was installed in May, about 50 per cent of TB-positive sputum tested in Daru Hospital are showing multi-drug resistant TB. A report by the Burnet Institute estimates registered incidence of TB in Western Province at around 500 per 100,000 people, much higher than the PNG health department estimate of 150 per 100,000. The true incidence of TB is likely to be even higher, due to poor access to testing in rural areas.

Back on the plane again I peer through the low clouds trying to get a feel for the landscape. I have travelled widely in PNG, but this is my first visit to Western Province. Through the clouds I get a glimpse of the huge Lake Murray system, which is just to the south of Kiunga. It’s big enough to get noted on any decent map of PNG. The plane flies over an endless swamp, large rivers snaking through the trees. It’s wet season, so the rivers have spilled over their banks and into the jungle. I can’t see any roads. I can’t see any villages. Suddenly an airstrip looms into view—we have reached Kiunga.

My host isn’t at the airport to meet me, so I sit in the tattered departure/arrivals “hall” and watch life going on around me. A white Troop Carrier pulls up to the edge of the tarmac, followed by a truck full of people. Most are dressed in white, some carrying plastic flowers in lurid colours. I can hear women weeping. Slowly a coffin is dragged out of the vehicle, the crowd surrounds it and the weeping is louder. Only the men carrying the coffin are allowed onto the tarmac. The family members crowd around the gate and we all watch the men walk slowly to the cargo hold of the small plane.

As they walk the sound of weeping is drowned out by the arrival of four helicopters (yes, four). As soon as they touch the ground white Land Cruisers are driven over to collect the big white men who alight from the choppers. Most of them are big figuratively and literally. They are loaded up and whisked away to wherever big white men go in this town. Later I find out that the helicopters have been really busy the past two weeks. Something is going on at the mines. Ok Tedi Mining Limited is the biggest mining operation in PNG. It was due to close in 2014, after over two decades of operation. Now the company has plans to try to keep the mine going for another 10 years. After
acknowledging that the environmental damage done by the mining operations was much worse than expected, Ok Tedi created a $1.4 billion fund, the Papua New Guinea Sustainable Development Program (PNGSDP). When the government of PNG decided to keep the mine running, the establishment of the PNGSDP indemnified BHP against future legal liabilities. The organisation that has brought me to Western Province is implementing a health project with the local Catholic Health service that is funded with PNGSDP cash.

I have been traveling for two days. My body is tired and I don’t want to process the juxtaposition of realities that are in front me at the airport. My host finally arrives and takes me to the relative peace of the Catholic Mission. Over dinner that night in the “Men’s House” we talk about AFL (one of the Brother’s was born in Victoria and is an avid Essendon supporter, apparently they lost on the weekend). We also talk about Prime Minister Rudd’s “PNG Solution” for asylum seekers that arrive by boat. During my flights today I had read my own copy of the daily newspaper. As in Australia, many educated people in PNG are deeply unhappy about the “PNG Solution.” One article I read described how more than one third of the rural community health posts in the southern part of Western Province are closed. Another article talked about the high level of maternal mortality in PNG (an estimated 733 deaths per 100,000 live births).

As I get ready to sleep I am grateful for little things, the shower that was warm when I expected cold water, a clean bed in a private room. I shut all the louvers against the night (stuffy, but malaria is the other major killer here) and sit in the dark, listening to the rattle in the motor of the ceiling fan. PNG desperately needs solutions, desperately needs some hope. A little story in the newspaper came to mind; for the first time ever two women were elected as Local Level Government councillors in a highlands province. A man was quoted in the article saying: “Well we voted them in, so now they have to prove that women can do it.” A small step in a country where in some areas 100% of women have experienced violence, but maybe a small step of hope.

Michelle Abel is an international community development consultant based in Sydney. She is currently working on projects in Papua New Guinea and Rwanda. She previously lived in Mongolia and Papua New Guinea, where she worked for ADRA.