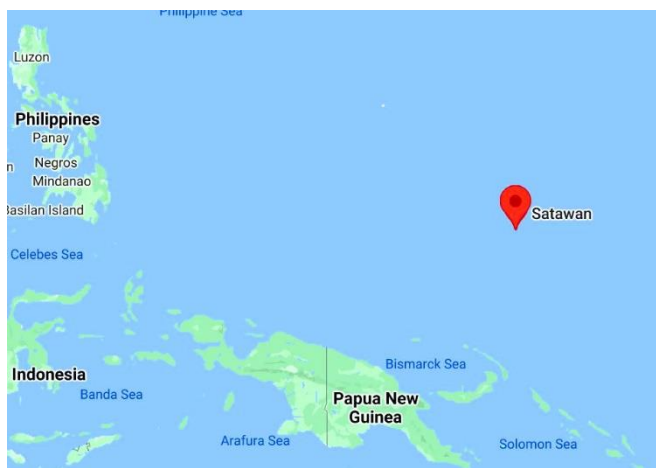


Gracie and I lived on Long Island for two years, '68-'70, teaching in Wyandanch NY. As we looked beyond our second year, we decided to look overseas again. Our years in Sierra Leone were fresh and very pleasant memories. Where to go? A potential job teaching in Zambia fell through. Through the RPCV grapevine, we heard they were hiring contract teachers in Micronesia. There was a Peace Corps program there which had a mixed reputation. It had the highest rate of volunteers extending their stay AND the highest rate of volunteers dropping out before finishing their two years. Looked intriguing.

A little searching and we found that we could interview in DC, so we got an appointment and drove down. I remember the interviewer emphasizing all the downsides. Remote. No electricity or plumbing. Few amenities. Isolation. We had been Peace Corps volunteers in Africa. None of this looked particularly detracting. I was hired as a contract teacher, and Gracie would be a "local hire". This was how they hired all couples. We would be on Satawan.

Now, where exactly is Micronesia and, more specifically, where is Satawan? It is kind of hard to find on a map, especially in 1970. No Google maps. Our atlas did not get that detailed.



So here it is. Got that? Kind of at the pointy end of the red marker. To be more specific, it was in the Truk district of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands. More specifically, it is one tiny island in a group of tiny islands called the Mortlock Islands.

The Mortlocks comprise three atolls, Satawan, Lukunor and Etal. Satawan is the biggest and has four inhabited islands. Lukunor has two, and Etal has a single

inhabited island. The island of Satawan is on the eastern corner of the atoll.

You are probably asking yourself: What exactly is an atoll. An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef that surrounds a lagoon. There may or may not be gaps in the reef that allow vessels to enter the lagoon. Also, there may be some "high" spots at various places along the reef. These are the islands. High is an exaggeration. The islands are parts of the reef that are above sea level, usually only a few feet above sea level. And the reef is usually a few feet below sea level.





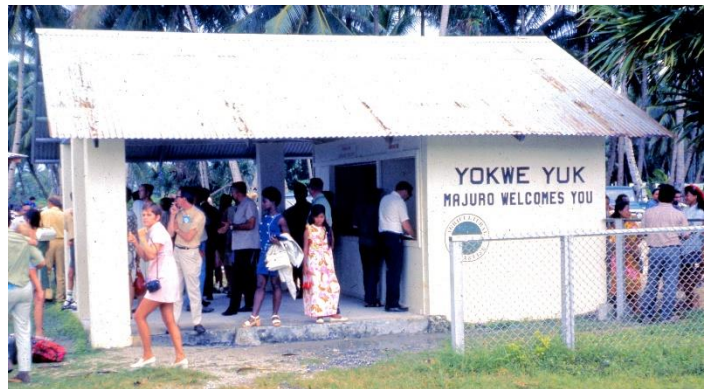
*An atoll seen from the air*

Additionally, an atoll does not have high islands rising from the lagoon. For example, Truk has a circular reef with many islands slightly above sea level. However, there are several mountainous islands rising from the lagoon. Truk is not an atoll.

Now that we had the job, it was time to finish the school year in

New York, turn in our resignations, and get packed for the trip to the Pacific. We shipped some belongings ahead of our departure. We got our tickets and began our journey. We stopped in Hawaii for a couple of days then boarded the Air Micronesia Boeing 727 for the flight to Truk.

Our flight made a stop on Johnston Atoll, which was a US military base in the Marshall Islands. Next stop was Majuro, the administrative center for the Marshall Islands, then Ponape and finally we landed in Truk.



*International terminal, Majuro*

At that time, Truk (now called Chuuk to reflect the local dialect) was the administrative center for Truk district, of which Satawan is a part. We were provided temporary housing in “Quonset 209” while getting orientated and



ready to travel to Satawan. There were many Quonsets around Truk which were left over from WWII. They were showing their age and were meant to be temporary structures that could be brought in on a ship and erected quickly. Quonset 209 was a hot box, and we were anxious to get to our new home on Satawan.

As we explored around Truk, we saw many reminders of the war. Truk was the

headquarters of the Japanese fleet. It took a beating from the Allied forces. The Allied forces were able to blockade all the passes into the lagoon and then bomb the warships as they sat virtually stationary. There were relics from the battles all over. It had become one of the best places in the world to dive on sunken wrecks.





We had meetings with education department people. We went shopping. This would be our last chance to enter a real store for a long time. We would be provided a house on Satawan and “utilities”, whatever that meant. There was no gas or electricity on the island. We would be provided a propane stove, a propane refrigerator, and a single bottle of propane. Having lived in Sierra Leone, where things like propane are not readily available, we were dubious. Fortunately, we had the foresight to purchase three single-burner kerosene stoves. We bought cases of canned goods including canned tuna and Spam. Any further shopping would take place in the hold of one of the freighters that would visit Satawan every 4 to 6 weeks.

The start of the school year was coming up fast, so it was time to board the “field trip ship” for the journey to Satawan. The government maintained a fleet of small ships that were the vital



link between the district center (Truk) and the outer islands, which include the Mortlock Islands and Satawan. We were to board the *Palau Islander*. We gathered up all our belongings and the supplies we had accumulated since arriving and were given a ride to the departure wharf where our ship awaited. We boarded. I can’t remember exactly what our accommodations were, but

they were not elaborate. We were not deck passengers, however. It was at least a two-day trip.

We made stops at several islands along the way. Passengers were picked up and dropped off. Small freight items were delivered, and high school students came aboard to attend Satawan High School where I would be teaching. SHS was a boarding school. The boys lived in a large, thatched dormitory and the girls were housed with various families on the island.



*Going Ashore from the Palau Islander*

The islands did not have a wharf for the ship to dock. It would hover in the lagoon and lower small boats with outboards and shuttle people and gear back and forth. Also, the islanders



*Canoes meeting the ship*

would come out to meet the ship in dugout canoes. They would meet friends and relatives arriving on the ship or they would board the ship and descend into the hold where merchants from Truk had set up shop. We would become part of this group very soon.

We finally approached Satawan Atoll. There are only three passes through the reef that allow a ship into the lagoon. We entered from the north and proceeded the 16 plus miles to Satawan Island. Apparently, the ship was expected. Residents of Satawan



*People of Satawan greeting the ship's arrival*

thronged to the dock, awaiting the arrival of the ship. The boats that would shuttle goods and passengers ashore were launched and we gathered our gear and, when it was our turn, we handed our belongings to the boat operators and climbed down to be taken ashore.

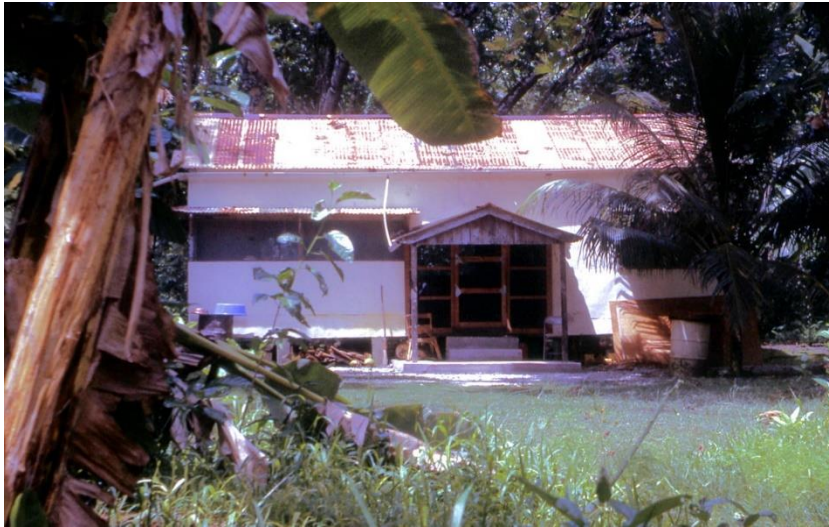


People were going to and from the boat for several hours. The ship's boats shuttled back and forth and islanders paddled out and back in their dugout canoes. It is a special occasion when the field ship arrives. We would soon be part of the throngs greeting the ships as they came and went during our stay.



We were ashore on the island that would be our home for the next two years or so. There were plenty of people to greet us and to help us with our belongings. I guess someone knew where we would be living. I can't remember exactly how we got there, but we ended up in the house that would be ours while we lived on the island. And all our stuff arrived as well.

The house had a metal roof, and the siding was sheet metal. It originally had a tree stump for

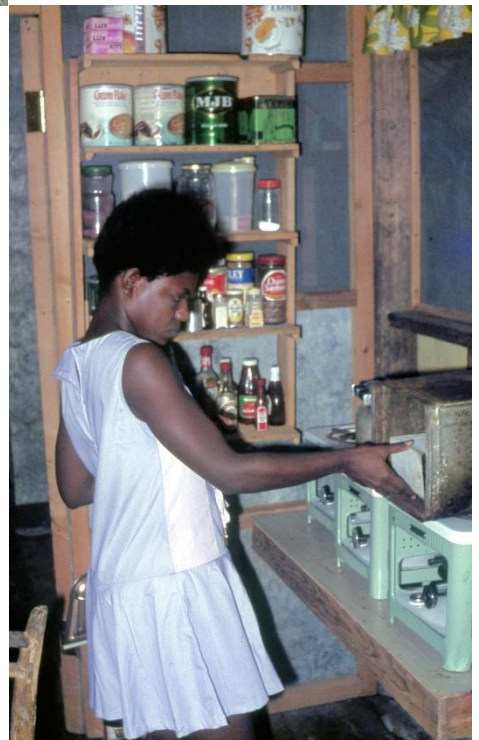


the front step. We eventually had concrete steps poured. It was a good thing that we had purchased the three kerosene stoves. The propane for the stove and refrigerator ran out rather quickly. We were able to get kerosene from the high school. This was part of the "utilities" that were part of the deal. We did not have an oven, but we got a "ship

biscuit" tin that we placed on a burner and were able to do some baking. In the photo to the right, Gracie is tending to some baking in the tin. We found a brick that we placed on the bottom of the tin and put the food being baked on it to keep it off the direct heat of the burner. Worked quite well.



Our water supply came from rainwater that we caught off the roof. A large ship's tank had been salvaged somewhere and had been placed at the corner of the house. Rain gutters channeled the water into the top and there was a tap at the bottom. We had some rain pass through the island most days. Rarely hard rains, but plenty for our use. We always boiled our water before drinking it. We had learned the necessity of that when living in Sierra Leone.



So we settled into our new home. Over the next several weeks, we hired some work from local people to put in some doors and screens. We built some shelving and made the house a home.

One final story about the house. As I mentioned, we were provided a propane refrigerator. We soon ran out of propane and our requests for more from Truk went unanswered. I started looking at the working part of the fridge. It did not have a compressor. It was an absorption mechanism which uses the heat of a propane burner rising through a tube to cool the inside of the unit. As I looked, I discovered that it had once been a kerosene fridge. There were tracks for a kerosene tank and other bits left over. I scrounged around the island and to my amazement, I found a tank for a kerosene fridge! It fit the existing tracks. I was not able to find the burner. It should also have a small glass chimney and a metal piece with a hole in it to channel the heat to the riser tube. I was able to contact a friend in Truk to get me a burner for an Aladdin lamp and send it on the next ship. It arrived and it fit in the tank. No chimney. But, the chimney is about the same size and shape as a tuna can. I cleaned up a tuna can and cut a hole in the bottom. It fit nicely. Next problem: how do I set the flame to the right level if I can't see through the tuna tin? I decided to turn up the flame until I got smoke at the top than back off. It worked. We had refrigeration again!

Next we had to get ourselves introduced to the schools. I would be at Satawan High School, and Gracie would be teaching at Satawan Elementary School. More about that at another time.