

feature

Mooney's emotional home coming

BRADFORD THEONOMI

Decades have gone and he had no idea it would come the day when he would set foot onto the land of his ancestors.

The tears of joy were plain on his eyes. But these were soon replaced with smiles as he sat to tell his story.

Graham Mooney is a descendant of one of the Solomon Islanders taken to Australia during the Black Birding days.

His ancestor was taken there to work in sugarcane farms in Queensland. Now he is returning to a place he had only heard of.

But that's not until he was 62.

"Setting foot here was very emotional," Mooney told the Sunday Star.

He was the first in a family of seven.

He and his siblings are fourth generation Solomon Islanders who now made and called Australia home.

"It was just unbelievable that I've finally made it to the place my ancestor came from. This is something I've been looking forward to in many years," he said.

Mooney's father was of Malaita and Gela parentage, while his mother was Ni-Vanuatu.

But his great grandmother and great grandfather are both from Solomon Islands.

"The excitement came to my family, everyone's happy for me and receiving texts telling me of going home is a heartfelt thing," the very emotional Mooney said.

"Touching down here, for me, I could sense myself living in-between the old and new South Sea Islanders.

"I could sense the image of seeing the natural bush and gardens that my father usually refers to in Mackay, Queensland.

"He always made a point - this is the Solomon Islands garden referring to his own garden, that, I can actually feel the mood being here differently," Mooney said.

He said he very much wanted to feel and get a taste of what local people do.

"I always want to know what local people do, I what to get a taste of what's it like."

Mooney said it was very exciting

the moment he stepped out of the plane, and not long after, he started to talk and meet people.

"I could sense the humour of connection, and would get the feeling of wanting to meet up with relatives here.

"That explains my first night on arrival; I was so anxious, wanting so much to walk the streets and get to feel what locals do.

"I guess that excitement and eagerness to discover my great grandparents' background, I could have jumped into a boat heading out to the province.

"If only it was not for my colleagues with the sole purpose of being, I would have wandered out somewhere in Malaita or Gela," he said.

Mooney is here on a fact finding mission with colleagues from the Australian

South Sea Islanders Association.

Their mission is to find, re-establish and unite Solomon Islands descendants in Queensland, Australia, taken during the black birding era to their ancestry links.

Unlike his colleagues who are mostly of ancestry connections to Vanuatu, Mooney was the one stand out who had blood ties here.

He never had that in mind as a child until he was matured enough to know, that is when he came to discover his roots from Solomon Islands.

But how did Graham Mooney actually relate in history through this past black-birding era?

With mixed blood ties including Aborigines, Mooney's untold story in discovering his family's ancestry in Solo-

mon Islands is history recorded.

Not a surprise of that Aborigine advantage; it gave Mooney an easier path for him to understand the different cultures and eventually pave through to discover his rightful connections.

"I have both Aboriginal and South Sea Islander heritage from both in my father and mother's ancestry.

"My father was brought up strictly in Solomon Islands culture and still speaks pidgin today.

"I was given the role as our biological family historian both on my father's ancestry and lineage into the Solomon Islands and my mother's ancestry and lineage into my Vanuatu heritage," he said.

Mooney went on and explain his connection in history.

"Our great grandfather, Kwailiu and great grandmother, Orrani were brought to Queensland as indentured workers to grow sugarcane in Innisfail in far North Queensland.

"My father came from Fataleka, Malaita in 1888. My father's lineage as a Solomon Islander comes through his mother Cecily Fatnowna, the youngest daughter of Kwailiu and Orrani.

"Cecily Fatnowna married Harry Mooney, whose Solomon Islander ancestry comes through his father's bloodline - Alec Lekki from Gela," he explained.

He said he might not be that first person in his extended family connections because his aunt, father's only Sister Isabel Sabbo with her daughter Karren Sabbo was here last year.

"My aunt visited Malaita on other occasions and had made concrete links to our families in Malaita and just recently there was a visit to my father in Mackay to pay respect to him."

Mooney said his father being one of those elders in Malaita that time of blacking birding, his status remains significant today.

"He is the most senior elderly between our family in Australia and our family in Malaita; he is well and alive at age 94."

A short stint for the workshop on FAEDEM BAEK FAMILI, Mooney wish he could make it up for and discover more of Solomon Islands.

"I wish I could have that enough time to go out and learn more of the provinces, especially to the yet to discover link of my great grandmother from my father's lineage on Gela."

"But it's certainly good to be home," he said.