Since I have been here I have been getting several visitors from this hemisphere. Today I had a visitor from PNG Papua New Guinea. Tauloi is his name he comes from Milne Bay. In a town of Alotau. In PNG like many parts of developing areas they are starting to make boats from fiberglass rather than timber as the timber resources are vanishing. There was a similar job a few months ago in Kenya. An Indian family from Mumbai had been living and doing business in Kenya for three generations. Turns out many Indians have businesses there.

This Indian customer hired us to make boat molds for work boats a 20 foot, 22 foot, 27 foot and 30 foot set of molds. They got us to do the job at less than cost with promise for future business and I fell for it. Extremely cheap $50k for four sets of molds. After I sent him the molds he sent photos of his new factory. I could not believe it. The factory was par with any state of the art factory in the U.S. probable $1 million plus. It did not make sense. Why get cheap on the molds but super rich on the factory? After that experience I knew it was better to pass then give a job away believing the customer’s sob story when turns out they are flush with capital. Stupid me, but I love building boats even if I don’t get paid!

I am visiting them later this month on my way to Kampala Uganda where there is a customer who is great. He is the chairman of a copper mine there. Just like the other buyers timber boats are scarce. This customer ordered ten 30 foot work boats. Kampala is located at the north shore of Lake Victoria. I am visiting him when the boats arrive in about six weeks.

Now I am going to Qingdao to check on the Kampala order progress. I don’t need to check progress as my crew there does a great job and can be trusted to deliver a great boat. I am going to get away from Sri Lanka for a while. The next entry will be from Qingdao as I am getting a ride to the airport in a few minutes when my driver gets to BSM.

I arrived in Qingdao last night about 4 am. The flight was delayed for weather. The first stop on the flight was Shanghai. I have never seen a more polluted atmosphere. The sky is gray from smog. Actually who can complain, the smog is made by people like me getting products made so we can make a profit. When I arrived several hours late my partner Lee was not there to meet and I do not blame him. Instead I got in a taxi and headed for a hotel. The driver ran me in circles to run up the fare. I knew this but let him. After all he has a family and needs the money. After about an hour ago going in circles I said OK drop me off at my hotel now. He told me it was five more miles. I told him to stop and let me out where we were. He did, I paid him with a good tip. I turned around and there was my hotel one block behind.

The next day I went on the wireless internet and within 2 minutes my computer was hacked and took on a virus. I called Lee to tell him where I was and to please get my laptop fixed. His translator asked what I downloaded. I soon learned why no one ever downloads anything here. If in Qingdao only upload, never download or you will get hacked.

We had a good breakfast me, Lee, his translator and a tech guy. The food in restaurants here is two types. One is just like any Chinese buffet in the US. Another they have all the meat and fish still alive. You choose the animal and they kill it and prepare for you. You want a baby pig for dinner, they kill it and prepare it. You want a regional fish, they scoop it up with a net and prepare it. My first lunch was with one of the boat builders’ there. He is a nice guy but speaks no English. Actually no one so far in the boat business speaks English. They all have translators.

My first lunch was with Lee, all translators and the well-known boat builder. When they serve food in the restaurants they bring out each course on a big plate and everyone takes portions off the same large plate with their chop sticks. With meat and gravy they bring out bread balls that is really doe balls. You break open the bread balls and soak up the juices and meat pieces. It is good comfort food and pleasant if you get over the fact that you are swapping germs with everyone at the table who gets the food from the serving plate with the same chopsticks they eat with. Actually eating meals together is more of a social time to become friends and that is just what I did. If you see the video of the Chinese making the 16 foot boat molds you will see the boat builder walking up to the plug being made

After this lunch we went to one of the factories. Qingdao is not like anywhere I know of. First thing you notice is the city is 50 miles long. When you drive from one end to the other it is all new sky scrapers. Picture Manhattan, then picture Manhattan for 50 miles. Except every sky scraper is unique and some wild design. New York City is a small town where compared to Qingdao. It is also Modern with new streets, parks and no trash. Everything I wish the U.S. could be.

The factories are not near the city they are west. Every factory I went o was at least 70 miles out. Except for one shop that was at the north end of the city. It was on a flat section of land about two acres carved out the side of a mountain. The main factories are way out past the city and into farm country. Every once in a while you see a village, then more farmland until the factory by itself in the middle of nowhere. Every factory was like that, out in the middle of nowhere.

One time I went to a factory with two brothers who made 40 foot luxury foot sport fisher boats. Great product half million each. The factory was state of the art, yet out almost 100 miles from the city. We had lunch together and one brother drank a lot. On the way back to the city the brother who drank too much began arguing with the driver. Then the driver slammed on the brakes and kicked us all out of the car in the middle of farmland and drove off. There we were 30 miles from the factory and nearest village and at least 50 miles from the city. The other brother made a call and soon we were picked up. If you look at the video of the two guys standing in front of the large yacht and me in the middle that is them.

Another time I went to a factory 60 miles from the city. I was taken there by one of the managers. When I got there he just let me go where I wanted so I looked around at all the work being done. It is the video of a 16 foot boat that is blue where I walk around. He left me to explore the factory. I observed a crew making a plug for a Holland cruise ship company. The work was very technical and could compare to any of the best naval architectural work in the U.S. I wondered for a couple hours around observing the state of the art boat building practices until I noticed the sun was going down. I then saw the workers all leaving. The workers live in a village nearby. I realized I had no way to get back to the city. I went to the guard who was locking the front gate. I guess he thought I was staying the night. He did not seem to care I was wandering around while everyone had left. The guards did not speak any English but somehow they got me a car and I got home. I went to oay the driver and he refused any payment. Go figure.

I stayed about two months as that is the longest my visa permitted. The visa is good for a year but only can stay two months at a time. Y can go to Korea that is very close for 24 hours then you can return for another two months.

My last night there I spent with the boat builders who were making the 10 work boats for my Kampala customer. That night everyone drank plenty except me. I do not drink. They kept filling my glass with booze and I kept pouring it out when no one was looking but all the while pretending to take sips. By the time we left every planter there in the dining room was full of booze. You see in every restaurant you have dinner in a private room not out with the crowd.

The next day Lee and the boat builder making my Kampala order took me to the airport. Lee as usual shook my hand. The boat builder who is my friend gave me a bear hug. He is on the video of the 30 foot work boat being made where he says “You Like?”

Today I am back in Colombo and it is back to the crazy but lovable factory. It is a change from one culture to another. In China they bend over backwards to help me. In Sri Lanka they say they want to help but unintentionally do the opposite. Here if I tell the workers to nail two boards together instead they cut two boards in half; and that is with a translator. After I unpacked I took my scooter to BSM and meet with the translator and Carleton to review and start the PNG job of new molds and boats.

It was then I looked up PNG on Google maps. It is a jungle. In Sri Lanka I am working in a third world country. PNG is not a third world country. It is a fourth world country still in the Stone Age. The customer also wanted me to gather a crew and go to Alotau to train the workers on building fiberglass boats. OK I figured. If the money is right I will do anything. I am not married and have no one so why not? Sounds like an adventure.

I had the molds made and shipped them to Port Moresby about 6oo mile North West of Alotau. I researched a little about PNG but it was nothing like I found. Yes the research showed it was primitive but did not fully show just how primitive. I arrived in Port Moresby where it was like landing in Chennai India. It is great until you get beyond the fence around the airport. Taloi was not there to greet me. He sent a car to take me to a sea plane dock because there are no roads from Port Moresby to Milne Bay. As soon as we left the city it became obvious this place was 200 years in the past. Few motorized vehicles except for the occasional auto or truck. Mostly animal carts. I had other customers in Port Moresby and they lived in compounds similar to in Sri Lanka. Here in the city it was modern but just a few miles out and you are in the Jungle.

We rode about 5 more miles to the beach where the sea plane was. It was a large seaplane that carried about 50 passengers. Taloi greeted me at the beach as we got onto a boat that took us out to the anchored seaplane. The plane was about half full and we went straight for Milne Bay. Most of the passengers were British or Australian. I got to talking with a few during the flight and by the time we landed I was ready to turn around. All the passengers went their separate ways with their own people. Taloi and I went to the only hotel in town. Actually if you can put your terror aside at the primitive location hundreds of miles from civilization you will notice it is probably one of the most beautiful creations God made on this earth.

The boat ride from the plane to show was like a dream. I could see down to the bottom of the bayabout 60 feet down and could see fish all over the place.

As we approached shore we passed near some rocks and around the rocks were the most colorful fish I had ever seen. These were the kind of fish you only see in exotic aquariums. Yet they were everywhere. We arrived at the hotel and no one spoke English. All the other travelers had their own compounds with their own kind. I was alone with no one to talk to. Even Taloi spoke only one or two words of English. Taloi and all the other natives had the look of primitive cave men dressed in modern clothes. It was getting dark as I settled into my room. As I laid down I heard a bell and thought nothing of it. Then a few hours later I heard the bell again and again though nothing of it. When I awoke from a short nap I went to turn the light on but there was no electricity. I went to splash some water on my face as there is no air-conditioning, but the water did not flow. I went downstairs to the restaurant about 9:00 pm but it was closed. Everything was closed. No one was around. OK, now I am a little scared.

I went back to my dark room and finally slept. When I awoke it was as if there was an explosion of life. Birds I had never heard before woke me up with loud squawks like a parrot but more like a shrill.

There were all sorts of animals walking about. I noticed animals like raccoons but were twice as big and with stripes from head to toe. There was a long tailed bird on my balcony with a long beak and webbed feet. It was like another planet. I went downstairs and sat for breakfast. One of the hotel staff brought me a cell phone and it was a guide who spoke English. Finally someone who spoke English. He and Taloi came to the hotel and we had breakfast together. I ordered two eggs and was brought two eggs as big as a softball. I told the waiter I would only need one since they were so big. I asked what kind of chicken laid these huge eggs and asked if they would please cook one over medium. They did not understand a word I said. I asked the guide what was the bells. He told me it is the signal the water and electricity are being turned off. I asked why everything was closed by 9:00 pm. All he said was do not go from your room after dark.

Everything was scaring the ^#&@@% out of me and at the same time I have never seen a more beautiful place. I realized that when I was in Sri Lanka I could always hop in a taxi and get on the next flight out. But here the seaplane arrives once maybe twice a week bringing supplies and seating is limited. It is not so easy to leave this place. The other westerners here seamed at ease and did not seem worried as I was. I guess one must learn how to relax. I met a few westerners from Australia in Alotau and tried to find out as much as I could. Toloi and our guide (actually it was my guide and translator) got into a jeep and headed out to the jungle to the location where we were to build the boats.

As we drove down the dirt roads I had my first glance at the natives. Near town they wore regular clothes but the further from Alotau the more primitive the clothes until about 20 miles from the seaside natives were dressed like a Tarzan movie. The building they had was new and surprisingly modern except for the lack of bathroom facilities. That was an outhouse. The molds arrived by ship a couple days after I did. They had a house for me to stay in near the boat shop but after hearing the jungle noises, native drums n=beating at night I decided to take the 20 mile trip back into town every night. That meant I had to get up before dawn and arrive back at my hotel about an hour before the bell when off signaling no electricity or water.

I noticed there was a never ending stream of jeeps going past the boat shop towards the jungle. Traffic was heavy constantly and I soon found out why, as well as why my services were needed. Turns out PNG is in a gold rush. There is gold in the rivers and lakes here. The jeeps were groups heading to the rivers and lakes to pan for gold. Toloi was part of a company that supplies the gold miners. What many are requesting are boats to go up the rivers and lakes to reach remote gold areas. The wooden canoes are not suited for the jobs needed. The boats are not bought by the gold miners they are sold to the village chiefs who then rent them to the gold miners. Turns out one cannot just go off into the gold rish jungle searching for gold. If you did you were likely to run into real head hunters and canibals. What the gold miners do is pay the local chiefs to use their boats to look for gold. When the leave they also must give a share of the gold to the village as tribute. I was told by my guide that a few months ago a miner tried to leave without paying tribute and was never seen again.

Later that day while getting set up to make the firs boats two of the village chiefs paid a visit to the shop. I was introduced as the boat man. Like in Sri Lanka the locals referred to me as the boat project. The chiefs were in native dress and had escorts serving every need, one servant just for swatting away flies and bugs. The chiefs could not speak English and I cannot speak whatever they were speaking.

We all had lunch that was like leg of lamb but I do not know exactly what I ate but it was good. It tasted like a cross between pork and lamb, with a definite wild gamey aftertaste. Of course we all ate with our fingers. Everyone else talked up a storm and laughed. I remained silent as I had no idea what they were talking about other than a few times my guide told me that the chief liked me. That is good news. I did not want to disappear in the Jungle. It came time for my driver to take me back to the hotel when one of the chiefs gestured I stay the night in his village. How could I say no? I was outnumbered 15 head hunter natives to me, the only white guy. I made a joke grabbing my belly asking “You’re not going to eat me are you?” Through my guide a chief said “No, we need you to make our boats” I think he was serious as if saying that if he did not need me I would be eaten.

This was my first experience truly out in the middle of a remote jungle with no support from the US embassy. No other westerner. Absolutely no one from civilization. My guide stayed with me as Taloi went off to his home. I was treated lie an honored guest. Everyone was very nice to me. The people are very gentle and kind. Except for the uncertainty and the wild life everywhere I really enjoyed the time there. Morning came and we had breakfast of some kind of stew and berries. Again I did not ask what it was I just ate and acted as if I enjoyed it.

I ended up staying about two more weeks then headed back to Colombo. I convinced taloi it was better to h=get a visa and have his men come to BSM in Sri Lanka then return to build the boats rather that me staying there the year it would take to train them. To be honest even though everyone was very friendly and the place is beautiful I honestly do not think I would survive very long there. It is brutal wilderness living. Not in the city o the villages, but I was at work in the Jungles among the natives, not in a comfortable hotel environment.

When I arrived back in Colombo it was a big relief. Sri Lanka is a third world country but at that time it seemed to be the most modern pace I had been in some time.