

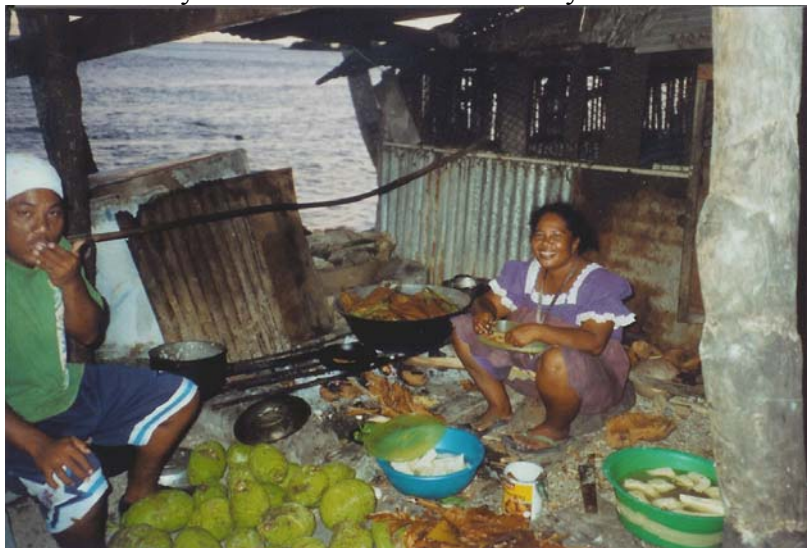
Michael Freeman, '04

Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia

This past summer, I was given an opportunity that few people are able to have. Joshua Morra, a fellow Siena student, and myself had a chance to travel to the Pacific island nation of the Federated States of Micronesia to perform acts of service within one of the communities there. Although the experience of volunteering was in itself wonderful, it pales in comparison to what I was able to learn and experience simply through being exposed to such a wonderful culture and people as I encountered in Micronesia



The journey to the site of our service was an arduous one. As we traveled from the east coast of the United States, we had stopovers in both Tokyo and Guam before arriving on the island of Chuuk, the capitol of one of Micronesia's states. After a few days rest we then traveled by way of a converted fishing trawler to the outer island group of the Mortlocks, where we were greeted by our host family and introduced into their way of life.



During our time in the Mortlocks we worked on a variety of projects, from helping in the construction of community buildings and working in communal agricultural fields, to help individual landowners in much of the strenuous work of keeping a functioning household in a place so isolated from the outside world. We learned how to fertilize a taro patch, yield copra from aged coconuts, and many of the basic skills of island life. In doing so, I personally gained a newfound respect and awareness of the difficulty in living in a society so different from my own.



My greatest lessons were not to be found in the skills I had acquired however. Instead, it was the attitude and generosity of the very people of the Mortlocks that offered a true education. Although they would be considered quite poor by Western standards, everyone I encountered was willing to share anything they possessed with me, not because I was from the US, but simply because I was a guest. Such kindness far exceeded what one commonly encounters here at home and drives home the fact that it is one's orientation towards life that determines one's happiness, not how successful or productive you are as compared to some artificial standard.



In the end, I cannot stress how much this experience opened my eyes to the true variety of human experiences and conditions and consequently I will always feel myself lucky for my chance to participate.

