

Josh Morra, '04

Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia

My name is Josh Morra. I spent my summer abroad with Michael Freeman in the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM). Micronesia is an archipelago nation in the North Pacific. We spent six weeks in Chuuk, the most heavily populated and economically impoverished state in FSM.

Mike and I were the first Siena/AMC students ever to spend our summer of service in Micronesia, and I had very little of an idea of what to expect. There were very few details available regarding any aspects of the trip, including where we would be staying or what kind of work would be available to us once we arrived. In order to choose a new site like FSM, it definitely required a certain sense of adventure and confidence in my own ability to adapt to whatever might occur.

After an intense two days of virtually non-stop travel, we arrived on the island of Weno, the main island in Chuuk State, and the most densely populated island in Micronesia. We landed in an airport, which consisted of one runway and a small, open concrete building. Problems did not take long to arise. The airline had lost our luggage at some point in our travels. Our contact was to bring us to Bishop Amado Samo, but was not at the airport, and we began our stay in Micronesia a little discouraged.



Luckily, we were able to contact the Bishop and were welcomed into his home where we would stay for our first night in Weno. The next day we were given rooms to stay in the parish dormitory, where we were shown an equally wonderful welcome. After a few days we were finally able to track down our lost luggage, and after five days on Weno, Michael and I finally set out for the Mortlocks, a remote group of outer islands where we would spend the remainder of our summer.



We spent several weeks on the tiny island of Moch, where I was exposed to a level of hospitality that I have never experienced in America. In every household we entered, families would welcome us by placing wreaths of flowers upon our heads, and hand-made shell necklaces around our necks. It seems as though everywhere we went, a feast had been prepared.



Unfortunately, because the people of Moch regarded us as their guests, it was very difficult to make them understand that we had come to work. It became a constant struggle to be able to participate in community service with any real depth. Eventually, Mike and I managed to get involved with the church youth group on Moch, which contributed to many of the public services on the island. We were able to help with projects such as clearing a field that was being prepared to grow taro, harvesting copra, unloading supplies when they arrived by boat, and paving the town paths with gravel made from coral. We also spent a week on the neighboring island of Kuttu, where we helped complete construction on a new church.



Overall, the trip was a great experience that exposed me to different cultural attitude. However, Micronesia was one of the few sites where service was based around manual labor, and this type of work did not facilitate the kind of social bonds I had hoped to make during my summer abroad. My trip may not have changed my life view dramatically, but it certainly strengthened my already existing belief that a good life has nothing to do with material possessions.

