

## School Life In Fiji by George Wong

Fiji is a group of small islands in the South Pacific. It has numerous primary and secondary schools and a newly-established University at the capital at Suva. Since 98% of the total population consists of non-whites, English is a foreign language for everyone.

The climate is hot and humid so that naturally there is no need for central heating. The temperature varies from the seventies to the nineties and is unbearable to some students.

Students wear clothes adapted to the warm climate—usually white shirts and shorts for boys and white frocks for girls. In Fijian village schools, boys wear sulus which are traditional skirt-like garments. Some students wear shoes but most go round in "flip-flops" or just stay barefoot.

Classes, taken in English, begin at around 9 a.m. the teacher is usually an Indian or a European. Teachers have the authority to inflict punishment, but not in excess. Outside of classes, students usually converse in their own native tongue—Fijian or Hindi. This often worries teachers because they believe that speaking some other language always hinders the progress of learning English. In some schools English must always be spoken in the classes and school-compound.

The chief games played in schools are soccer, rugby and basketball, although baseball, volleyball, hockey and table-tennis are also played but to a much lesser extent.

Xavier College lies on several acres of open and wooded land and consists of three blocks of class-halls. It is staffed by Irish priests and local teachers. It is quite modern with its Chemistry and Physics Laboratories and a library.

It is a multi-racial school attended by Indians, Fijians, Chinese, Rotumans and other Pacific Islanders. Although it is a Catholic School, as the name implies, non-Christians are a majority. There is no race distinction at Xavier College, or for that matter at any other school in Fiji. The students mix around freely and there is no racial bias or tension.

The priests, with the possible exception of the Principal who probably has to keep discipline, are very friendly with the boys. Take Father O'Sullivan for example. During the last two years that he has been at the College, he has introduced many new pursuits. The Duke of Edinburgh Scheme is a fine example and many participants have already been awarded medals and certificates. Athletics were revived after staying dormant for several years. The first school magazine was published under his supervision and guidance.

Comparing "home" with Fiji, an American priest once said that Fiji was better because everything was "so simple" and life proceeded slowly. Sure, there are no televisions, but the people are contented. An Irish priest liked the local climate although he admitted that it got too hot at times. "The cold and rain in Britain and Ireland just chills your bones".

(NOTE: George, a convert to Catholicism, is a Senior in Xavier College and hopes to go to a University next year. His parents came to Fiji from China after World War II. His father died some years ago but his valiant Chinese speaking mother is succeeding to educate his three sisters and three brothers. George speaks four languages; Hindi, Fijian, Chinese and English. He has a few Irish phrases. Fr. P. O'Sullivan of the Columban Fathers is Principal of Xavier College and is a past pupil of St. Colman's).