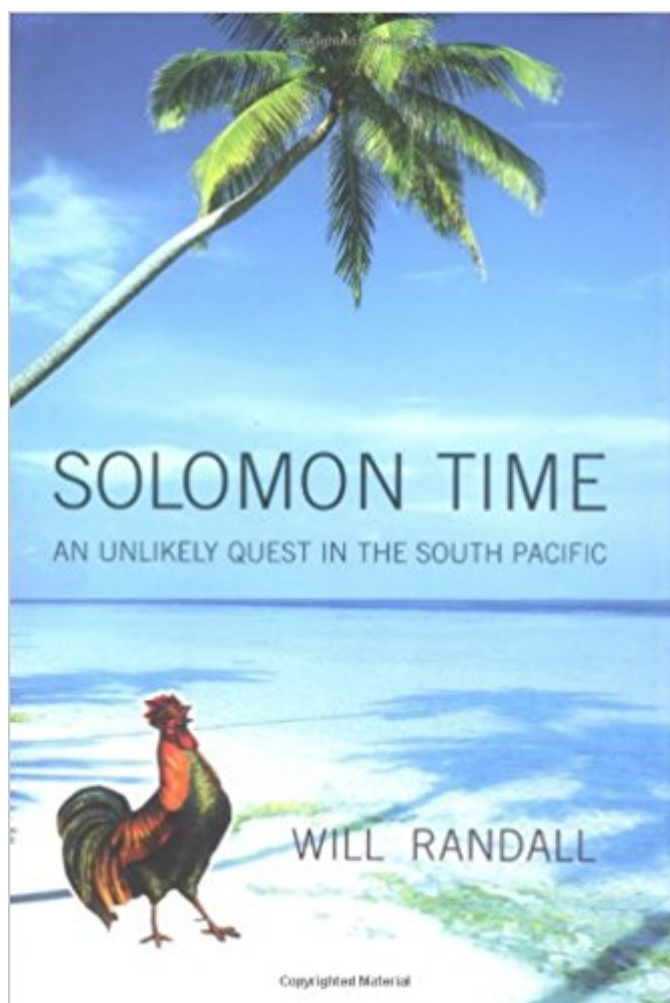


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Solomon Time: An Unlikely Quest In The South Pacific



Synopsis

Who hasn't fantasized about dismantling his or her hassled, wired-up life for a simpler existence? Yet who among us has the will and opportunity to do it? The answer, of course, is very few. Will Randall, a young English schoolmaster, had such a chance -- and took it. He uprooted his conventional First World life and let himself be blown to one of the farthest and most beautiful corners of the earth, the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific. In the entertaining tradition of Bill Bryson's *In a Sunburned Country*, this is the story of *Solomon Time*. From the first, it's an improbable journey. In a chance encounter on a rugby field, Randall meets a doddering old man known as "the Commander," who has retired to England after running a cocoa plantation in the South Pacific for thirty years. Six months later, the Commander dies and his will is read: he wants someone to travel to his beloved, long-missed island -- where his plantation has fallen into ruin -- and devise a way for the natives to support themselves. If successful, they might avoid poverty, build a new school, and even fend off the greedy developers circling their peaceful waters. It's a mission of noblesse oblige, yet possibly a fool's errand, too. Randall agrees to go. Spread across the Tropic of Capricorn, the Solomon Islands are not so much the Pacific archipelago that time forgot as the one that forgets time. Randall's new home is Mendali, a fishing village so remote it can be reached only by motorized canoe. But the people of the village, some with cheeks engraved with a rising sun, are welcoming, for they remember the Commander kindly, and still practice a pagan Anglicanism in a church he built for them in 1956. They sleep in houses made of leaves and live on fish of every sort, mud crabs, yams, ngali nuts, even the honeycomb of termites. Randall decides that the villagers could raise chickens, and they greet the idea with enthusiasm. But finding live chicken eggs in their watery world proves wildly difficult, and Randall must chase after the eggs over shark-infested seas and through jungles where strange characters reside, including a one-eyed dwarf and a tattooed lady. One couldn't imagine a better man than Will Randall to help the people of Mendali meet the twenty-first century on their own terms. But will he succeed? *Solomon Time* is a moving and witty account of one man's accidental adventure in paradise and is certain to enchant explorers and armchair travelers alike.

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Customer Reviews

Schoolteacher Randall was in such a rut he barely noticed it. He'd spent 10 years trying to teach French to unwilling British schoolboys. All his 30-something buddies were pairing off in respectable marriages, while his occasional girlfriends were becoming increasingly rare. Suddenly, after a slightly inebriated evening, he found himself involved in a bizarre mission: to fulfill the last wishes of an old man affiliated with his school, he agreed to go to the Solomon Islands and help organize a community project. Armed only with supreme ignorance-and a certain boredom with the life he'd been leading-Randall set off. In spite of his anxieties, he found everyone on the islands delightfully friendly, unhurried and unworried. Randall quickly relaxed into "Solomon Time," i.e., manana, whenever. His attempts to call a meeting to discuss what sort of self-help enterprise the islanders would like were ignored, so he decided they'd raise chickens, since no one else seemed to have thought of it. A capital idea-except they needed starter chicks. Randall treats readers to a picaresque adventure through the Solomons in search of elusive chicken dealers. Eventually, Randall's village not only got their chickens, but were so successful they started a Chicken Willy fast food joint. After about a year, with terrible reluctance, Randall decided it was time to return to England and see what the rest of the world was doing. Randall's account is great fun, perfect for, as the dedication suggests, "anyone who thinks it might be time for a change." Map.Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In the comical bunglers-abroad mode, a refugee from civilization regales readers with the story of his adaptation to South Seas living. English schoolteacher Randall decamped for the Solomon Islands, enjoined to fulfill the will of a plantation owner who commanded that his legacy be applied to a project for the islanders. This task structures Randall's self-deprecating narrative, for he arrives admittedly ignorant of everything about the Solomons, and his anecdotes track his risibly steep learning curve. After descending the technological transportation ladder from intercontinental jet to

dugout canoe, Randall arrives on Rendova, a scene of fierce World War II combat. Peaceful languor has since reasserted itself, marked by the inhabitants' indifference to punctuality, which Randall gradually absorbs through all manner of adventures, including his mock-heroic survival as a castaway. Equally snafu plagued, Randall's project, chicken husbandry, both mystifies and amuses his islander friends, as it will Randall's readers, who will be chuckling over the author's humorous stumbles in his implicit satire on Westerners trying to uplift non-Westerners. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

This is a pleasant, vaguely humorous (though rarely laugh-out-loud funny) memoir from a British teacher in the Solomon Islands. The author, who portrays himself as a good-natured bumbler, stumbles into the opportunity to travel to a small island in this remote country and enact some scheme for the betterment of the islanders. Once there, he eventually stumbles on the idea of a chicken business; then follows a long but ultimately successful quest to obtain the necessary chickens. Meanwhile he enjoys the pace and beauty of island life and the company of both islanders and expats. And there's not too much else to say about this one: it's enjoyable, but not particularly insightful; we don't learn too much either about the islands or the author. When Randall questioned the veracity of Arthur Grimble's memoir of Pacific island life (which I also recently read), I started to wonder about Randall's own honesty. A few episodes seem very neat, and really, who loses his footing and falls headlong into a bush or a pile of sacks every time he gives a speech? Once I could believe, but twice? Nevertheless, this is a nice lightweight read and helped fill in the Solomon Islands on my mental map. And it's one of the few expat memoirs of the Pacific that made me a little jealous.

I read this book because I love travel writing, because I was a Peace Corps Volunteer (in Ghana, West Africa), and because I have been to the Solomon Islands. So when I read some of the descriptions of the book I became excited about Will Randall's "Solomon Time." Well, I was not too impressed. Not entirely disappointed either. It was refreshing to read conversations in pidgin English and read descriptions of Honiara and Munda (though I disagree that Honiara is a horrible place). What I was hoping for was more closure to the story and more lessons learned as a volunteer. It sounds like Will had a good experience with his chicken project and the follow up restaurant, but what became of these ventures? I, for one, don't remember Chicken Willie's in Munda when I was there in 2009, but perhaps I missed it. I don't know how I could have, but perhaps... Some of the descriptions are quite contrived, too. I love a good descriptive travel narrative, and if your job is to

describe the Solomon Islands, you'd better be ready. It is a brilliant place with more colors than anywhere else in the world. His description of the chicken crowing and the sun coming up like a big fiery disc... blah blah blah... was just not up to par with how other travel writers could have dealt with it. I'm a fan of Theroux and Bryson, so perhaps I was expecting too much. The book also reads like a choppy set of chapters all thrown together with little links between them. There is a story, but it runs as an undercurrent to different self-contained chapters. I found this to be a little annoying, especially considering the fact that the main story doesn't really conclude itself. Okay, the project becomes something of a success, but then what? An unlikely quest? Yes. I just wish it was a more vivid quest with a few good lessons learned. Hem alright lelebit.

Most interesting book. It kept me reading and not wanting to put it down. Was like I was experiencing what the author was experiencing.. You would never believe this book could be so well written and with humor too. I would recommend it to everyone. Conveys the message that we should slow down, smell the roses, appreciate what we have. Maybe we should live a little on Solomon Time too!

Read AFTER our 8-day Solomon Islands cruise on the MV Bilikiki in 2014, it was a great reminder -- and, oh so true. A must for Solomon Island explorers -- my 2nd time. The first included Rendova as a crewman on the PT-103 in 1943. Things are calmer now.

As an American I found the book to be very interesting not only for the relaxing journey through the South Pacific but also for Randall's British ways. Reading Solomon Time made me think of Will as Hugh Grant. The conversations with the islanders were very good, the descriptions of the island scenery and people was great and I feel like I came away knowing a remote village in a far flung corner of the map, which is always an indication of a good book.

First of all if you are going to be anti-American, and he is, and then lie about Americans in your story, at least get your stereotypes correct. Americans, in particular Texans, of whom he is demonizing, don't talk like Australians. His three comic book villains, vile Americans, are given a manner of speech found only in Australia or the U.K. We do not say mate, bloke, reckon, y' reckon, a bit of a feed, or pardner. While some do wear cowboy hats and big buckles, they generally do not wear these outside of a ranch or rodeo setting. The author seems to bumble his way about, to magically hit upon a very complex restaurant scheme in the end. Which if you follow his way of writing and

references to himself, he could never come up with on his own. Seems as though he was patently handed this scheme and passed it off as his own over a difficult quest. He throws in regular clichés into his story, that no one would fall for more than once. As far as his restaurant goes, I was there around the same time and saw nothing of the famous "chicken willy's", perhaps I just didn't go far enough in Honoria to see it, or maybe it just didn't last that long. Then again, if memory serves, wasn't much to that town to begin with. He also seems to skip any mention of past military landmarks and ruins on Honoria itself, though does mention it on another island. How you can miss the tanks and leftover WWII detritus and memorials around Honoria is beyond me. Over all skip it. It is a fanciful tale and nothing more, not what it's made out to be.

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