

In The Gap

A Monthly Prayer Guide

Praying for the Needs of the Somau Garia People of Papua New Guinea
and the Owen Family who Minister Among Them

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Before and After

Before

We find ourselves, tucked snugly into limbo, stranded between the two “worlds” in which we live. Depending on the hospitality and love of friends for a place to sleep and work, we have no home and few possessions. As I write these words we are exactly a week out from climbing to 30,000 ft. and arcing over the Bering Strait en route to Japan, which is our first international stop before landing in Papua New Guinea.

We have found the last few weeks disorienting, tiring, melancholy. There is a deep, genuine sense of purpose and a certain *drawing* by the Holy Spirit, yet we feel heaviness in leaving. Perhaps it's rooted in having said goodbye to Dad forever when last we left for the edge of the world, or maybe we simply understand the difficulties ahead. Whatever the case, we are moving forward—expectantly—looking to God to work both in the lives of the people to whom we go and in our own lives, to bring us to maturity in Christ, useful tools in the hands of the Master.

On that thought, I bid you each farewell—for now. I will write the “after” section in Madang, after we have visited Uria Village and given our friends an initial “hello”. Grace and Peace to each of you.

After

Arrival

We walked off the airplane into the arms of God's grace. Like Missouri, PNG is enjoying a time of unusual coolness in the weather, things are calm, and we can finally take a breath and give a huge sigh of relief: “Home again.” The cumulative stress of months of traveling, disorientation, and anticipation flowed away with the surf as we walked along the ocean front that first morning after arriving.

Uria

Uria has been home to us for much of the last eight years. Friends like Patri, Topi, Wilip, and others have taken us as their own. Like family, we've had our ups and downs with these friends, yet they have been our constant companions. We were feeling the butterflies flapping around this morning as we hoped to see some of them today. Now is the time in rural PNG where people are away from the villages areas much of the time preparing gardens for planting and we were afraid that we would miss them.

Our drive out was pleasant—the road is as good as I can remember seeing it, though our four-wheel-drive trek leading into Uria was perhaps worse than I've ever seen. The scenery was good for keeping the butterflies at bay, though, we needn't have worried. For, when we pulled into Uria, there was Wilip, Stanley, Pari, Topi, Kotoy, and later Patri, along with Angela's friends, notably Korenime Lim, whom many of you prayed for this year while she was pregnant, with her new son, Milkey. Our kids were delighted to be welcomed by most of their village friends.

We were, once again, in our own home, the sounds of gleeful children playing outside, smiles and pleasant conversation being shared all around; love, affection, and joy being poured out at every turn—and a certain sense of irony playing at the edges of my consciousness.

We visited for a while then went upstairs to remove plywood from the windows and to begin cleaning up a year's worth of geckos defecating on the floor, dust blowing in through spaces at the top of the walls, etc. As we cleaned the house, we noticed that there were far fewer signs of rat damage (or dead rats, for that matter) than we had anticipated. I was thrilled that somehow the Lord had kept the rats somewhere else for the year. With that in mind, I had gone back outside and after a good long story with the guys, I walked up and, lo and behold, above our kitchen sink was the skin of a

snake that had shed its skin—hanging right in front of my eyes. I hate snakes!!! We have only had one other snake in our house in seven years. Then it occurred to me—the reason that there was no rat damage, no rats, no nothing was because of the previous owner of the skin hanging over my kitchen sink. Isn't it ironic that God so often uses that which frightens us, concerns us, worries us, for our good? Like suffering, or the sweat of our brow, or the guy who just drives you bananas, God used the unspeakable snake to keep the rats at bay—after all, snakes don't eat your mattress or books or toilet paper—they eat rats!

Those hours in the village today were so very good to remind us of God's grace and tender mercy in bringing us out to Papua New Guinea to serve him in the ministry of Bible translation. Through those ironies of life—like using suffering to produce character and difficulties, perseverance—He makes us useful tools, mature and Christ-minded.

It wasn't long before we started *feeling* like useful tools. While we were visiting and cleaning up the house, one of our friends, whose English name is Charles, came to us asking us to take his family and new baby to the hospital. His new daughter was born the same day as Josie and was suffering what was either pneumonia or asthma. It was terrible to hear her try to draw in breath. She was alive when we left the hospital and we have had no word since then. Please pray for Charles' daughter—that she will live and grow up to honor and serve Jesus with her life.

Other Concerns

The search is on for a suitable replacement to our venerable Nissan Patrol which, every day, rolls a little closer to its retirement. To date, you all have contributed a little over \$14,000. The best price we've seen on used ones that are in good enough shape to consider is around 65,000 kina, or roughly \$22,000, depending upon what the exchange rate happens to be the month we have the funds telexed. Thus, we are still about \$6,000 short of the *minimum* price of replacement. We are deeply grateful for the generosity of those of you who have had a part in that \$14,000. Thank you. Please continue to pray that the Lord will prompt his people to meet this need. The sooner we can replace our ageing vehicle the better, as the approaching rainy season will seriously degrade road conditions and will make reliable transportation ever more necessary.

While working on preparing the house for our return, I checked the batteries and they are indeed ruined. At the point in the day where the batteries should be holding a charge of about 13.5 volts, I could barely get 11.45. Thus we are in the process of finding something to use while waiting for our crate to be shipped (which will, Lord willing, have four deep-cycle batteries in it).

Please pray:

- That our first stay in Uria after an absence of over a year will be free of illness, that we will have strength and strong endurance.
- That we'll have supernatural insight into how to present Christ to the Somau Garia.
- That our fluency in the Somau Garia will increase ten-fold, especially as we work on analyzing the grammar.
- That the Lord will work miraculously in bringing reconciliation between various clans. I learned yesterday that there is even more disunity than there was when we left. Disunity completely shuts down Garia people being able to work together, which plays out exactly as Satan desires.
- Ask God to bring a sense of renewal and commitment to the men who have been diligently working at the task of translation—especially the drafting that they have worked on in our absence: Ezekiel Panawa, Siramia Kauwaki, Stanley Worja, Sominak Yuna, Wasia Soni.
- That God will provide a sound strategy this year for translation *and* for evangelism/education.

Thank God:

- That we had a good flight back to PNG, that all of our luggage made it without incident, and that we are making adjustment well.
- That God is continuing to provide for our vehicle replacement fund.
- That the roads are passable right now (it is dry season).
- That our kids are, once again, happy, content, and are once again "home".

Thank you for your kindness in sharing in our ministry through prayer and financial generosity. Your lives are making a difference here at the edge of the world.

Todd, Angela, Andrew, Samuel, Abigail, Hannah, and Josie