



The Storyboard

Spring 1999

published by the Papua New Guinea branch of Pioneer Bible Translators

Editor's

Corner



The Potter at Work

During a five-week stint in the village of Tokain, I remember a day spent with a lady named Natalia and her children. Very excitedly she said that lunch would be cooked in a clay pot. The soup would be "sweet" (or "savoury" to us), she said, because of this process. After Natalia arranged a small stone base for the round-bottomed pot and surrounded it with firewood, she very carefully lined the inside with green leaves and tightly filled the space with chopped sweet potatoes, taro, cooking bananas, and greens. Natalia topped it off with coconut milk and capped the pot with half of a dried coconut shell. As we sat back to visit, my hungry glances towards the bubbling pot grew more frequent. Indeed the vegetables cooked in coconut milk were "sweet," but I suspect that part of the enhanced flavor may have come from a longer anticipation of the end result.

Archeological sites leave no doubt as to the usefulness of clay pots throughout civilization. Our articles for the 1999 issues of The Storyboard will be loosely based on the theme, "The Potter at Work." Whether it be ways that we are being molded (as with articles by Todd Owen and Diane Miller in this issue), or how He is shaping the lives of our PNG co-workers (see "For This Time" by William Butler), we want you to know more about what the Potter is doing in the country of Papua New Guinea. Though we are human, fragile, and sometimes a little cracked, we want to be useful vessels, giving a "sweet" aroma, in which His power can be demonstrated.



PNG-made clay cooking pots.

Introducing . . .

Our newest arrival is Kirby Weythman. Kirby is participating in the Pacific Orientation Course and will be joining us full-time in town in May. We look forward to adding him to our Technical Services Department. Kirby is a member of our elite group of second generation missionaries. His parents, Gary and Gerry, served the branch primarily in the area of technical services in the 1980s (departing in 1990).



Kirby Weythman

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For This Time

By William Butler

Just a young man, in his late teens or early twenties, newly married. At first glance, not the brightest or quickest of his age group. Really quite ordinary in appearance. Nothing really to distinguish him from fifty other villagers.

But still, he stood out. There was just something about him. He seemed to possess insight and wisdom beyond his years. Definitely, his heart belonged to God. Though he was still learning exactly what it meant to be Christian in his culture, it was obvious that he greatly desired to do so. Maybe that is what drew me to him nearly twenty years ago.

This affable young man, Muwom Tokarang, soon became my helper as I explored the complexities of the Banaro language and plumbed the mysterious depths of Banaro culture. We spent a lot of time together and our relationship grew. He became my mentor, my confidant, my friend—one upon whom I could absolutely depend to be honest and to advise me well, regardless of the circumstances or of his own personal interests.

Still, Muwom was inexperienced in much of life. His instincts were good but he was far too young to have a hearing in broader Banaro society. But with a heart for God, he was clay in the Master's hands.

In the '70's and early '80's, the Banaro Christians were still young in the faith and struggling to know how their faith applied to their lives and culture. What parts of their culture could remain as they



were? What parts had to change or disappear altogether? They were also still bound by centuries of fear of evil spirits, not yet realizing the greater power of God.

When Muwom's father, a Christian, died in 1984, Muwom asked me if I would have a funeral for him. As soon as I finished the message, the body was placed on a pallet supported on the shoulders of eight men and the ritual began. To the Banaro mind, the old man had obviously been killed by sorcery and they were duty-bound to determine the source of the sorcery. Individuals began to approach the body and call on the old man's spirit to reveal the sorcerers to them, a direct rejection of the Biblical teaching about Christians who had died that I had just emphasized in my funeral message. This was a slap in the face to the faith of the old man, his children and every Christian in the village. I looked at Muwom and saw the confused

agony on his face but also recognized that he felt powerless to stop it.

A year or so later a young mother, who was Muwom's cousin, fell ill under circumstances that indicated sorcery to the Banaro mind. The people met to ferret out those responsible. They believed it was necessary to do this to counteract the sorcery in order for the woman to get better. However, before the meeting began, Muwom stood up in their midst and challenged them, "We cannot do this. This woman is my sister and she belongs to God. We must trust God to heal her." On the strength of his statement, the hunt for a sorcerer turned into a prayer meeting and the woman was healed.

Just a year passed between these two events, but the change in Muwom was notable. What had happened? At the end of 1984 a powerful movement of God's Spirit swept through the area, challenging Christians to make a full break with their past. Many brought out their fetishes and other means of performing sorcery and burned them. Muwom was tremendously affected by this touch of God on his life. As the Spirit filled him fully, he realized that God's Spirit was greater than any of the spirits the Banaro encounter, whether the bush spirits or the spirits of the dead. He began to implement this truth in his life.

Over the years God has continued to mold and develop Muwom. He has gone through many trials. His young brother got sick and died in his arms. Several of his children have faced major illnesses requiring

evacuation to the hospital and one of them died as well. The list goes on but the point is, nothing that has happened has shaken Muwom's trust in God. He has persevered and brought his faith to maturity.

It's a good thing, too. He really needs all his strength right now. Today Muwom is the Councilor for Likan village, representing the people in the regional government council. He has to make decisions that affect his own people and the whole area. Seven of the ten Councilors are not committed Christians so their viewpoints are often quite different, making Muwom's job more difficult.

As Councilor, Muwom is also the *de facto* leader of Likan village. Recent economic changes in the area have seriously affected the peoples' lives like no other event since the coming of the white man. Christians are struggling to adjust, while holding on to their faith in the midst of temptations and materialism. They need a strong leader with integrity and a serious commitment to God to point them in the right way.

I can think of no one better prepared to accept the challenge than Muwom Tokarang. God endowed him with certain natural abilities and has given him twenty-five years of experiences as a Christian to hone and shape him to be His man for His time.



Robin Butler, Rondal Smith, and William Butler in January.

William and Robin Butler were recently honored by PBT for over twenty years of service. Rondal Smith, President, made the presentation during his visit in January. William and Robin first arrived in PNG in 1979 and have served for the last 19 years with the Banaro people. They are the parents of Tyler (age 16) and Bethaney (age 14), both students at Ukarumpa High School.

God is Still Molding Me

by Diane Miller

Previous to my last furlough in 1997, a friend from the Australian Churches of Christ Mission (ACCM), Elizabeth Tema, mentioned to me the need for someone to help out with Sunday School at the Madang Church of Christ—perhaps by training Sunday School teachers. The only thing I did at that time was to begin praying about the matter. Then, after my return to PNG, another friend and ACCM missionary, Fay Christensen, brought up the same need. Before long I was involved, teaching a Sunday School class and trying to encourage involvement by the ladies in the church. Yabru Jerry, the preacher of the congregation, really pitched in and tried to encourage this as well. Zora, Yabru's wife, soon began to help me and eventually took over the teaching of the smaller children.



Sebastian (center) and Kolins (far right) in Sunday School.

Two sons of Zora and Yabru, Kolins and Sebastian, were in my class, and their daughter, Kila, was in Zora's class. It was quite evident to me that Yabru and Zora had taken time to teach and train their children at home. I often mentioned to Zora when I went to plan lessons with her how much I appreciated their two boys. They knew the Bible stories well, almost always learned the assigned memory verses, and were a good influence on the other kids—especially the older boy, Sebastian. He helped get the other kids going in a drama we presented one Sunday. When we made booklets for the smaller kids' class, Sebastian and Kolins were among those who carefully and neatly copied the words of the story. Sebbie was often helping others in one way or another.

Then suddenly, Kolins and Sebastian were there no more. I was shocked when I received a phone call one Monday morning telling me Sebastian had died the previous night, probably of cerebral malaria. He had not been in class for two Sundays, although I had seen him after class the Sunday previous to his death. I knew he was older than some of the other kids. I figured he was beginning to feel a bit too old for our class and was therefore choosing to remain with the adults for worship. I did not know he was sick the Sunday he died. I found it hard to believe I would never see Sebastian again. In the short time I had known him, he definitely influenced my life. It is always hard to understand why young people with seemingly great potential are taken early from this life, but the Lord knows and He is in control. I am just glad He allowed me to get at least somewhat acquainted with Sebastian. I was the Sunday School teacher, supposedly molding young lives by teaching them Christian principles, but the Lord used the example of this young boy to influence my life.

The family went to their home village for the funeral and a time of mourning. They decided not to return to Madang and the house that had been Sebastian's home, but to stay among their people at least for the present.

Before Sebastian died, Yabru had been involved in a revival that was taking place in his home area in the Kire language group. When he visited Madang in January, he mentioned the good news that Kolins had decided to commit his life to the Lord. Do pray for Kolins and his new life with the Lord. Pray for Yabru and Zora as they continue to adjust to life without Sebastian and to serve the Lord and nurture their family in the area where they now live.

Pray also for the leaders of the Madang Church of Christ and for revival and spiritual growth. Pray that the youngsters in the Sunday School classes will really come to know Christ and love and serve Him, and let Him mold and shape their lives. Thank the Lord with me for the two church ladies who are now teaching Sunday school—Sinias and Kathy. Pray for me as I continue to work with the kids and the other teachers in the capacity of a substitute teacher and one who helps provide activities to go along with their Sunday School lessons.

Diane Miller helps further the cause of Bible translation by serving as a teacher to the children of missionaries. Her involvement at the local Church of Christ includes training PNG children who will one day be church leaders. Diane originally came to PNG for three years as a short-term assistant... that was in 1985. Prior to becoming a part of PBT, she served as a teacher in Germany for many years.

Technology from the Equatorial Rain Forest

Pioneer Bible Translators' PNG Branch is on the Web!

From this site, you can read up on PBT-PNG personnel, read about the languages we work in, view a map of our alloca-

tions, and learn about our mission associates. You can view issues of *The Storyboard* online, be updated by the weekly prayer sked, view high resolution photos suitable for print-

ing, read stories written by PBT kids, link to other PNG sites, and see other fun and interesting things. The address is:

www.pioneerbible.org.pg

A Glimpse of Heaven

by Todd Owen



Just last week it was, when I caught a glimpse of Heaven. It didn't come in the usual way—in the midst of fellowship, joy, peace, an epiphany of sorts after some especially meaningful spiritual experience—it came at a time that seemed more like Hell on earth than Heaven.

We had been working hard for several weeks—trying to get the groundwork laid for a series of gospel meetings coming up in December. It was decided to delay because of a lack of interest by the church leaders. We had been working hard to prepare for the arrival of our Forwarding Agents and were frustrated by long hours, short tempers, and lack of sleep. I had been in “the dark night of the soul,” as some of the Puritan writers call it, struggling over some issues of my own life. Our refrigerator had just stopped working. *And*—our water tank was low.

Now, a low water tank is not usually something to get bent out of shape about. We have other sources of water—granted they are not as convenient, but we do have other sources. But some of those issues I had been wrestling with had to do with faith and prayer. I was tormented in my soul by the minuteness of my own faith. And our tank was low. I saw this as an opportunity to prove to myself that I was faithful and so I prayed. The first day was sunshine. Our tank was low. No problem. I said to myself, “I’ll watch and pray.” The second day—clouds, promising ones at that. No rain. The third day was the day we had a beautiful lightning storm. We sat outside praying and watching the show. Rain!!! Oh, less than a tenth of an inch. The next day, Angela came to me and said, “Honey, the tank is low. Sure hope we get some rain before next week!” My temper flared and in the most self-righteous scream I could muster I rebuked her: “GOD KNOWS OUR NEEDS—NOW STOP WORRYING ABOUT THE TANK AND FORGET IT!!!” Who was I really rebuking? Was it really Angela? No. I was rebuking myself for my own lack of faith and she was the most convenient outlet for my frustration.

Then I sat down to pout. Like Jonah of old, I began to grumble and gripe and groan. And get depressed. And get angry. “Lord,” I prayed, “we need rain. I see clouds but no rain. I WANT IT NOW!!!” I whined. The more I pouted, the more I focused on me and my petty impatient desires, the more gloom and darkness clouded over my soul. Hope began to slip away as I wanted to utter, “I’d rather die than not get what I want.”

I am so thankful that my Heavenly Father is no more intimidated by my childish temper tantrums than I am by my children’s.

It was in the depths of my pseudo-despair that I saw the Lord, high and lifted up in all His majesty. I became silent as the Book was opened. Then came the voice of the Lamb that was slain: “*When the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?*”¹ Ouch! “*Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. And again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*”² Ouch! Ouch! “*Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory*”³ Ouch! Ouch! Ouch!

As I sat in the presence of the Lord, with the Book open before me as if in a mirror, I looked at my own foolishness and

was ashamed. Eyes turned to the floor, I wanted to cry the words of Isaiah, “*Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips...and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.*”⁴ Then the tongue which had given me such a stinging rebuke turned to tenderness. When Isaiah realized his inadequacy in the presence of the holiness of the Lord, God met his need. “*Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, ‘See, this has touched your lips, your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for.’*”⁵

Then the words of Paul, in his letter to those at Rome, came to mind. “*What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!*”⁶ And as I contemplated my own wretchedness, these words came, “*There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death.*”⁷

As these words from the Book flooded my mind I came to rest in the peace of Jesus. A quiet calm came over me and the Lord began to restore my hope as well. Words of hope came. “*For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.*”⁸

Out of my selfishness, unbelief, and ungratefulness, God reminded me of who He is and who I am.

Just last week it was, when I caught a glimpse of Heaven. It didn't come in the usual way—in the midst of fellowship, joy, peace, an epiphany of sorts after some especially meaningful spiritual experience—it came at a time that seemed more like Hell on earth than Heaven.

And outside my office window, it began to rain.

Todd and Angela Owen marked the second anniversary of their arrival in Papua New Guinea in February. Todd, Angela, Andrew (age 5), Samuel (age 3) and Abigail (age 1) live in the village of Uria. In addition to continuing to learn the Somau Garia language, Todd spends much of his time training church leaders. Because of recent landslides, one of his current projects is to repair the “road” into their village.



The Storyboard is published quarterly by:

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¹Luke 18:8, ²James 5:17-18, ³Ephesians 3:20, ⁴Isaiah 6:5, ⁵Isaiah 6:6-7, ⁶Romans 7:24-25, ⁷Romans 8:1-2, ⁸1 Thessalonians 4:16-17