

Update from Danowage Village from Trevor and Teresa Johnson:



Summary of the last decade: We work in Papua (the left side of the island of New Guinea, part of the nation of Indonesia) among the Northern Korowai people, the northern part of a remote tribe described as the “Treehouse People” by *National Geographic*. There are almost 2,000 people in our immediate northern area, with 2,000 more in the southern dialect. They are animistic, occasionally violent, and their families are full of dysfunction. There are no roads or stores or electricity, and (until two years ago) no government presence.

We first entered by helicopter in 2007 into a small clearing. Then we had a water-strip opened so that a floatplane could land on the river until 2014. Then a gravel airstrip was completed. This gravel airstrip took 6 hard years of labor by Papuan evangelists with 3 of the workers dying from malaria contracted during the work. Viewed positively, this gravel airstrip was a triumph of hard work in the jungle. Viewed negatively, many of the evangelists sent by the Papuan churches ended up moving dirt for years and were too tired to truly disciple the people.

Since 2014, the Indonesian government has suddenly woken up to the needs of the tribe. The Korowai have become a symbol of the primitive, and this is shameful to the regional government who is supposed to be “developing” them. Government help is now pouring in.



The rock airstrip was paved by the government. Now it is being lengthened and the government promises us a road through our region within the next 2-3 years. Government teachers have entered several posts to our south, and the Department of Health has come upriver several times this past year. They now give us meds for free whereas we bought all of our medicine ourselves in the past. They have worked together with us well...so far. There is even a governmental program to enable us to fly out emergencies for free and we've already used that service several times. In years



past I've spent tens of thousands of dollars to fly out and treat the sick or injured. Because of your donor money enabling me to treat these emergencies in the past, at least a handful or two of people in this region are still alive today who would have surely otherwise died. And many more lesser cases have been helped.

The world of the Korowai is quickly changing. The people before could barely make wooden canoes; now a few possess trolling motors. The kids barely played in the past and just seemed to sit and stare, but now dozens of kids play in our yard every afternoon at soccer and volleyball and marbles. We've seen the village go from a state of 90% skin disease and severe malnutrition to a healthy crop of fat babies and clear skin. Not a single person could read in Danowage in 2007 but now most of the school-kids can read, and we've gone all the way through a simple Indonesian version of a catechism. Paul is now translating that catechism into simple Korowai as well.

During our first years here, we felt as if we were drowning in work. We seemed always near burn-out. Teresa got a tropical virus and couldn't even walk for almost two weeks and suffered two miscarriages afterwards. I once had malaria, dengue, and giardia all at the same time and hallucinated and do not remember large swathes of that time. But there was slow progress nonetheless in the work.

This hard slog persisted until Paul and Trish Snider joined us in 2013. We also changed missionary organizations and now work with Heartcry Missionary Society. These added workers and a better mission org have both greatly aided us. Paul is skilled with his hands and the physical layout of our missionary grounds is now much more pleasant and enjoyable. It is nice to be in the village now.

Paul and I had our own school built in 2014, and employed teachers with our own funds until 2017. This was a heavy load. We saw the need to establish a more sustainable model and so we are now partnering with Sekolah Lentera Harapan (Lamp of Hope Schools) and 4 professional teachers (paid by the foundation and not by us now) will arrive next month and are even now training for life interior in Papua, which poses unique challenges. This foundation is not only Indonesian-run and explicitly Christian, but also has a Calvinistic statement of faith. All the teachers will not only be professional teachers of high quality, but are also all reformed believers. I am still self-funding a teacher for the Mamberamo village of Fuau where my friend Yulianus ministers.

My wife and I are Registered Nurses and we've operated a health clinic off our front porch every afternoon for years. And I hike out to treat the sick in the treehouses away from the village. Now we switch off duties every week with the Sniders. But this can still be a wearying duty. We thank God that the Siloam Hospital will plant a professional health clinic here as well in a few months, staffed by Christian nurses.

These steps in education and healthcare make our gains in Danowage sustainable. And in this manner we can escape the



very low quality of the Papuan government workers often assigned to interior posts. Now, if we were to suddenly fall ill and had to leave the field, the ministry would not die with our absence but could continue, at least in its educational and healthcare aspects.

The entrance of the Lamp of Hope Schools and Siloam Clinics came just in time because I was stretching donor funds thin and began to fall into debt trying to support this expanding ministry. But now I am paying off debts and hope to be above water soon.

Our plan this year has been to establish a good infrastructure for both education and healthcare and then return to an evangelistic focus. We have welcomed several excellent evangelists from the Papuan churches this year, Yus Weya and Wemin Wonda. These two have been in the pipeline for 4-5 years, having been selected in 2012 for service here but in need of training first. These new evangelists will supplement the fine work of Jimmy Weyato, Perin Lambe, and Wetinus Bogum. Not all of our evangelists are very good, but these 5 are excellent. We are also currently teaching a baptism course for 6 Papuans and hope to baptize them all in September. I also hope to baptize my own daughter Alethea who is professing faith now. Pray for her as we disciple her.

Now that the summary is over, let me describe the activities of the last month or so.

Recent activities: The last month or so started out very hectic, but we are now in a (very welcome) lull. About 6 weeks ago we had a man come and claim a little girl who was promised to him as a bride. She has run off twice before and we put her in the home of a professed believer to protect her (her own father), but he gave her over again to this man and we went upriver to search for her to free her but we never found her. She was a school girl. Several other school girls told us they wanted to go to school but were afraid the adult men would try to claim them. So we've threatened a few men and I finally called the police into Danowage to come with guns and display a show of force and make a speech to the community that child marriage must end this year. If the tribal men are not motivated by the gospel in their heart, maybe they will be motivated by threats of violence against them. We also dealt with a man beating his wife.

Then I was attacked by a pig after I tried to protect a boy who was bitten and chased up a tree by the attacking pig. The owner of the pig (one of the bad evangelists) got mad because we killed his pig and he ended up throwing rocks at us. The Papuan Church structure promises to send him and several other sub-par Papuan evangelists home and has put one man under discipline. The wheels of the Papuan Church move slow, however, and some of their home church areas are now engulfed in violence and occasional fighting as Indonesian elections roll around.

Because of your quick donations, we are almost finished building an anti-pig fence around the school and our houses to protect all the kids from any future pig attacks. Thank you for your generosity.

We also had a regional flood on the 4th of June. Many people suffered a loss of gardens or pigs. The Indonesian churches and local government



reacted very admirably and we organized relief and several flights brought in food and seeds and gardening tools to rebuild. The faithful Evangelists Jimmy and Yus distributed the relief supplies to 9 villages and I sent reports and photographs to all the donors.

We've had LOTS of visitors this past month. We had government and police and builders and people from and Cara visit. Cara and Nathan got to hike out to a treehouse and treat a man who had a tree fall on his head. Cara gave her first two injections of medicine and they got to experience jungle hiking. Nathan helped with projects around the house and got to enjoy the pleasures of trying to dig garbage holes into the jungle's soupy clay.

Now, there has been a much-needed lull. Lots of people have malaria right now. Me and Noah are both sick with malaria, too. Because of your donor funds we were able to buy the best (but most expensive) malaria meds, spending thousands of dollars, and so our cases are very mild (but it is still sort of awful, even if mild). Thank you again for your generosity. The flood from last month seemed to bring lots of mosquitos. We live in a world of mud and it rains every day. Our solar batteries are running low. I have no dry or clean shoes. We were going to have a meal and a prayer meeting tonight but out of the 15 people usually present 5 of us had malaria.

We are trying to stay interior for a 6-month stretch and exit in November. Then we will take a rest and get dental work done. But the crown on my tooth (that basically is my whole tooth) just fell out tonight and I hope we can last until then.

Long-term I think we need 10-15 more years here to see a healthy sustainable change happen in this region. But another decade in the jungle will be very hard, I am sure. We'd like to see a healthy school, a functional clinic, and a church not only full of Korowai believers (and we do have some believers now) but also led by Korowai pastors and evangelists. Currently, Jimmy Weyato is a good pastor here, but he is highland Dani and we are desiring to work towards Korowai shepherds leading Korowai sheep. We are confident that it will happen.

The future is as bright as the promises of God.

PICTURES (top to bottom): (1) River scene along the Ndeiram Hitam next to our village, (2) New Evangelist Wemin Wonda preaching to assembled school kids at the end of the school year, 2016, (3) Teresa helping a sick baby on our porch during afternoon clinic, (4) Alethea holding Baby Leah, (5) Me after wrestling a pig, (6) Me and Curtis Knapp talking theology at the creek while the kids swim.

To read more, go to the Heartcry Missionary Society blog site or email me at: sovereigngracemissionary@gmail.com. We also have a Facebook group to post ministry updates. Our sending church is Bible Baptist of Saint Louis.

