

# Dear Friends and Family,

It's been about a year and a half since my last newsletter, and a lot has happened. I spent the past 8 months Stateside and have only just now returned to Indonesia and am rejoining Ob Anggen school for the fall semester.

After two years I finally got my Indonesian work visa in March (no more extended tourist visas for me!) and I arrived back in Papua the middle of May in time to visit for the school graduation and closing semester. I heard many victory stories and it was great to be able to be there to celebrate our 12<sup>th</sup> graders. We have a theme for each graduating class and this year was the “Overcomers” for their fortitude and perseverance through many challenges. We have 12 graduates this year: Rosa, Karolina, Marlin, Arwen, Alfrida, Doni, Alfia, Billy, Tinus, Samuel, Christin, and Daniel. We are all really proud of all the effort they've put in through the past 13 years in Ob Anggen and are sad and excited for them to leave the nest and fly on their own wings. Please pray for them, that they will continue to hold onto God's hand and let Him guide them through life.



*Our graduates*

After graduation I had the opportunity to travel around Indonesia with friends during our summer break, visiting their home villages and experiencing other Indonesian cultures beside Papuan. We spent a week in Toraja, South Suliwesi at the childhood home of two of our staff, Selvi and Serli Pagoga along with two of our students, Isai and Salion, whose hard work and good character were being rewarded with the opportunity to live in a culture outside Papua. Toraja is a beautiful, mostly rural mountainous region about 400km north of the big city of Makassar. Torajan people are hard workers, building rice paddies into their mountain valleys and tending to their water buffalo.

Each family grows their own rice and stores about a years' worth in special storehouses called Lumbung, which have come to signify a family's wealth and influence. The more Lumbung you have the greater your status, and even greater respect is given you if you also have a Tonkonen, a large decorated traditional house. Toraja also has a very strong cultural presence and deep animistic traditions that continue on today, in many ways much more advanced and ahead of Papua, but in many animistic practices very much the same. Torajan culture makes a HUGE deal about funerals, my friend's grandmother passed away 1.5 years ago and is preserved and waiting for the extended family to gather enough money for the funeral, a grandmother funeral requires at least 24 water buffalo to be slaughtered, at three thousand dollars per buffalo that's quite a lot. A very important family in the same village (they have 9 lumbung and a Tonkonen) had a funeral for their grandmother last month and slaughtered over 100 buffalo, including 10 "Bonga" buffalo, which are slightly larger with white spots and cost a LOT more. The 10 bonga buffaloes prices ranged from \$80 thousand dollars for the cheapest to \$160 thousand dollars for the biggest, those plus the 100+ regular buffalo make it \$1.6 million for the buffalo alone, that's before the rest of the food and showers of money and other stuff they do at funerals in Toraja...and that is in dollars, after conversion from Indonesian rupiah, this sum is even more outrageous here than it would be in America. Torajan culture revolves around funerals and water buffalo, my friends' commented that Torajan people "Live to die", they're not important while alive but very much so after death. While Toraja has a rich culture, it also keeps the population rather poor, all their money going to building lumbung and raising and buying buffalo. Indonesia is a great place to study



*Torajan Lumbung*



*Isai, Salion, Agape, and I at the 9 Lumbung neighbor house*



*Salion and Isai helping to feed the buffalo. I am really proud of these two, from the very first day they took initiative to build a new set of stairs down the embankment to the house, brought up rocks to floor a muddy spot under the house, every day searching for something they can do to help.*

cultures, there are so many here with very unique traditions. It is also a great place to study issues and the effects of animism within cultures.

Next was two weeks in the city of Manado, north sulawesi island visiting my girlfriend's relatives, Manado is the northern most city in Indonesia and is actually pretty close to the Philippines. Manado is similar to the city of Jayapura in Papua, the jungle-y mountains going straight to the ocean; jungle, mountains, rice paddies, and beaches all pretty close together, maybe why a lot of Manadonese go to work in Papua. I became the designated driver and got to drive the family car all over the place with my girlfriend and her cousins, driving on the left in a car set up backwards from our US cars (except the gas and brake, praise God they're the same) through super crowded city streets with basically no traffic laws, and then super narrow jungle-y mountain roads that twisted and curved a lot.



*Manado Sunset*

Living with family was great too, the Aunt was really kind to us and a wonderful cook, and she cooked almost nonstop, we would be finishing breakfast and she's bringing out new food for lunch, I'm sure I gained a lot of weight during my stay! Also Manadonese people are known in Indonesia for eating everything that moves, I ate field rat, bats (really dark meat, quite good), cat (unintentionally, but also pretty good), but there are still many more I didn't get to try, like snakes and monkeys. I made a lot of new friends, my girlfriend's younger cousins accompanied us everywhere and we became good friends. We met Doctor Bill, my friend Anas' old friend from her previous volunteer ministry, we had a long talk with Bill and his girlfriend about their work and the effect of animism still embedded in the culture. Then later we met his family at church, his brother works with local churches translating the Bible into native languages around Manado; having the Bible in their own language gives them a sense of worth and respect for their own language and culture. Manado is a beautiful place and I really enjoyed my time there and meeting so many new friends.

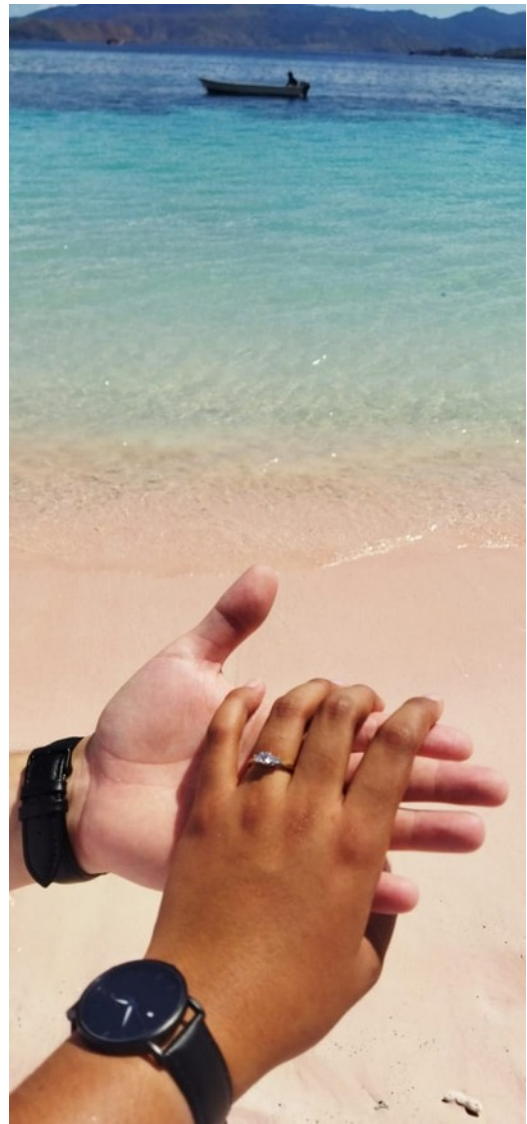


*Ready to eat rat!*



*Toraja rice paddies*

This last week of June we went to Labuan Bajo, a port city with hundreds of small tour ships that provide tours to the surrounding islands. Our original plan was scuttled when a ship sank the week before we got there and our tour company canceled all its ships, but we were able to get a one day trip to most of the same destinations. We had an amazing day, snorkeling over beautiful corals and we got an extra gift of Manta Rays that swam right under us, komodo dragons on Komodo island, a short hike to an amazing viewpoint, and Pink Beach, which will always be more special to me as the place I proposed to my fiance. It was a perfect day.



*She said Yes!*



*Anas' cousin Agnes knew we were hopeless and took it upon herself to be our photographer and decided our outfits and everything. We were really lucky she came with us!*



*Bokondini: It's good to be back :)*

I'll be heading back to Papua the beginning of July to prepare for our semester which starts on the 18<sup>th</sup>.

This year our director and his wife, Scotty and Heidi Wisely, is taking a well deserved and well needed sabbatical back in the states after a long time on the mission field. We pray that all will run smoothly in their absence, that they can get away from all the stress of running the school, and that God will give them much rest and refreshment. We have faith in our leadership team and our Principles and management teams in each campus. Please pray for our principles: Priskila (jr. & sr. high school), Letera (Bokondini), Hero (Dogobak), Demsita (Eragayam), and our elementary school manager Erick, that God will guide them and lighten the stress and burdens those positions carry. We are looking forward to a good year, and know that God will be with us here in Papua.

Also I would love to hear from you all, what's going on in your lives, how I can pray for you that sort of thing. Two way streets are always better than one way streets and that goes double for communication!

May God bless you all and hold you very close,

Elijah Sheldon

Extra photos for y'all to enjoy



*My brief stint as an assistant pig farmer*



*More piggies*



*Traveling companions: (clockwise from left) Anastasia, Serli, Galadriel (being held), Marmul, Rira, Lia, Mikah, Selvi, Salion, Isai, and me.*



*Dragon Fruit*





*Isai at the entrance of a traditional Torajan holding on to their old animistic culture burial cave. The coffins on top are hundreds of years old*



*Giant statue of Jesus. Much like Papua, Toraja embraces Christianity while*



*Rack of buffalo horns on a traditional Torajan Tonkonon*



*Isai*



*Salion*



*Catching fish by hand in a rice paddy. Out of our catch of 20 fish I caught exactly 0*



*Anas and I collecting pig food*

That's all folks!