

## August-September

### Dear Friends and Family,

August was a busy month, we had our hands full dealing with classes and students and all. I am very happy to be core teacher of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, they are great kids and have a lot of energy and enthusiasm. One of our transfer 10 graders was moved down to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, so our class grew to 19 students. Subjects vary a little between grades, but for 9<sup>th</sup> grade they take English, Indonesian, Math, Science, and Bible every day and Leadership, College and Career, Public speaking, and Current Events once a week.

In chemistry class we recently did group projects on the periodic table, memorizing the first 20 elements. We had presentations, dramas, songs, and a variety of games, scavenger hunt, card games, a version of snakes and ladders, and guessing games. I am blessed to have such creative students, since I have the creativity of a lump of cheese it's good to have them balance me out!

Speaking of cheese, some of us are quite creative in cooking with our limited food options. I've had contextual pizza and spaghetti from other staff, blueberry jam and cheese mix, and our intrepid english teacher, Uncle Tommy, regularly brings chili and other American cuisine items to our staff "Fun Night"s every other Friday night. Generally speaking it's our ladies who are the creative cooks, at the single mens house we pretty much cook everything the same few ways. Regular dinners are rice, some kind of (usually fried) veggies or leafy greens, and tofu or tempe (another soy bean product) for the protein. This semester Anas' dad gifted us a bunch of canned tuna, so every now and then we splurge and eat tuna in place of tofu.

When not teaching or preparing lessons, we've been leading martial arts clubs after school, and riding our newly acquired motorbikes on the weekends. Anas leads the girls martial arts club, with her background of years of Karate and Muy Thai she's a capable instructor, especially compared with the boys' martial arts/self defense club, led by Mikah Leenhouts and yours truly; between the two of us we have maybe 2 years of various disciplines. We recently set up two tires on trees in place of proper punching bags and practice rolling, blocking, along with the basics of Muy Thai and Krav Maga. While



*Students setting a rusty metal thing as a roof for this table. The rusted holes make it less of a protection against rain as from unwanted presents from birds...a gift some of our staff have already experienced!*



not super professional, we certainly do have fun, get good exercise, and hopefully are imparting good discipline habits and confidence to our students. Offroad motorbike is a new sport for me, we have a group of proud motorbike owners among our staff and we go riding on the weekends up in the pineapple gardens/jungle. In Indonesia motorbikes make up anywhere from 60-90% of traffic, cars are rare, especially out here in Papua.

The beginning of this month we had a series of spiritual attacks on our students in the dorms. The first night was also the most extreme, that night we had 4 students from Chosen Dorm get hit with varying levels of demon possession at the same time. It started with one new dorm girl who has been inviting a demon in for the past year, her father passed away a year ago and this demon comes to her appearing as her father, she invites it in because it brings her comfort. But demons always lie, and this time was worse than previous times (her friend explained this happened often back in their village) and the demon brought friends who got to three other dorm girls. Jeremy, the dorm parent of Chosen Dorm, had a conversation with the demon in the girl, in response to questions it told its name, it knew God's name, "Jesus Christ", and nodded that it was afraid of that name. It also hissed and got angry in the light, so everyone shown their flashlights at her and Jeremy told it "You will only find light here, so you might as well leave". The whole altercation lasted from 9pm until 2am when the demon finally left. The dorm kids were really sleepy in class the next day. The next night it happened again, but only to the original girl, then the next week the next dorm down, Hopeful, got hit with another case of demon possession, but not as dramatic as the week previous. Thankfully the rest of the month we've had no more cases of this. The Devil hates what we're doing here, we're invading his territory and bringing light into these spiritually dark mountain villages, and he fights for it. But although he has power, he cannot win against the Holy Spirit. We don't and can't defeat demons and the spirits of the land, but God already has, and with Him in us, nothing is impossible. It is pretty wild coming from America where Christianity has held sway for long enough that the spirits have mostly been pushed out



*Early morning view from the girls house, living above a sea of clouds*

and we hardly ever or just plain don't experience these kind of things. Demons/spirits of the land all that is true, and it's amazing experiencing first hand these things and seeing how potent the power of God is. Things that I only knew in theory and only half believed, I'm experiencing.

Another challenge with the local culture is the distrust in medicine, science, and Indonesians in general. It's sad to see so many people die from easily preventable diseases or injuries, I have seen many die not from lack of medicine, but refusal to take it. Death is a normal part of life here, very different from the US where we send the aged to nursing homes far from us, making the approach of death and death itself something we don't have to see or think about. The aged live here with their family and there is usually a funeral in the village every few weeks. Andika, one of our 10<sup>th</sup> grade girls, has been in the hospital for going on 6 weeks, the doctors say it's an appendix problem, but her father and extended family refuse to let her undergo surgery. We're hoping it's a misdiagnoses by the doctors and this refusal by the family won't be fatal for her. The extended family/clan has tremendous power over individuals in Papuan culture, and often decisions are made by uncles or other clan members not even closely related to the individual in question.

I realize I usually write about all the problems and challenges, but there are many victories too. Since my last newsletter Marlin has been doing much better, while her mind is not yet healed, she is doing a lot better, we have much more hope now for a total recovery for her. Please continue to pray for Marlin.

August 17 is Independence Day for Indonesia, and here in Papua we usually get demonstrations and whatnot by the independence movement around then.

This year did not disappoint, all the bokondini schools stood out in the sun in formation and listened to a speech from a visiting dignitary, then after dark a parade of honking cars and motorbikes went back and forth shouting for Papuan freedom. Thankfully around Bokondini the freedom movement group is not very violent, there seems to be an unspoken agreement between the army and them, we don't bother you, you don't bother us, some other places in the highlands this would be a very dangerous time.

That's about all my news from this month, I'm writing this sitting on my bed in the dark, we have electricity issues recently, I heard someone cut the pipes for our hydro again, a usual occurrence during the dry season. Today our water was out too, I showered in four dipper-fulls of water...been a while since I did that. Life here is certainly not boring, and I am thoroughly enjoying it.

I'm late in sending this newsletter, so I'll add in the first few weeks of September. I had my first real, though not too serious, motorbike accident, not counting falling into tall grass while riding up the hill here in Bokondini. Anas and I drove out to Wamena for the weekend and stayed with Anas' sister, a doctor in Wamena, and while going for a ride I fell going down a gravel slope. Thankfully Anas on the back came out without a scratch, but my leg was trapped under the motorbike so I slid with the bike a few meters. Nothing broken, just a sprained ankle and a lot of skin scraped off, but it was painful enough. We were with 2 doctors when I fell, and we were staying with doctors, so getting the right



*Anas and her doctor sister Olivia*



medicine wasn't a problem. There is great perks in having a doctor as a sister in law! The next day was Sunday and we had to go back to bokondini to teach on Monday, so we got it bandaged up and rode back, slowly, to Bok. A friend gave me crutches, he crashed his motorbike just a few weeks before and thus was a little ahead of me in the healing process, we had a good laugh and many jokes of the "Who's turn next week?" nature. It's more of an annoyance really, trying to unsuccessfully keep infection out...thank God for antibiotics. It's been 2 weeks and there's only a few spots that hasn't healed up yet.

The other big news of this month was about a week after my accident, we had quite an exciting day, too much excitement really. That morning at school we had several large groups of men go by the road doing their chant/war cries, their equivalent of marching songs, but also to demonstrate power and "we mean business". Quite exciting for our new staff who had yet to experience it. Here in Papua when two groups/clans want to fix a problem they head to the police station in large numbers and have the police handle the issue, the closest they have to a court. Not sure if this is new to the culture, since Indonesian police and military try to keep tribal wars down, or if it's just a new way to do an old thing. The problem being handled this time was a husband-wife issue, that was also connected to the Bokondini-Dogobak war from a few years back that was still kinda smoldering between the two villages. The wife in question was from Bokondini, the husband was from Dogobak, and the son of the main guy from the previous problem that started the war...also a husband wife issue from what I heard. We had just finished lunch and were about to start work time when we heard gunfire break out from down by the police station...and a LOT of it. The last time this happened a year or so ago it was the military firing in the air to break up a fight, mostly the Papuans have bows, machetes, and are quite proficient at throwing rocks.

It must have been quite a fight, because the gunfire sounded like the 4<sup>th</sup> of July for close to 20 minutes straight, then sporadic bursts of gunfire over the next 2 hours. We saw more people running down the road, going home to get their bows, axes, and machetes and running back to join the brawl. Our students said that was likely the sign that someone had been killed and things were escalating. We gathered our students together and sent them to stay in the dorms, the Bokondini students could go home after things calmed down. We gathered and prayed together, we have Dogobak students, and some of our leadership and families were actually visiting Dogobak, the truck goes to our campuses in



*Chemistry project: Lala, Rolly, Zulfianti, and Raisa test who has best memorized the first 20 elements of the periodic table*

Dogobak and Eragayam rotating every other week, and the head of police and head of military were both students' parents, they would be the ones in middle of the scuffle trying to handle the situation, and their houses were right next to where the brawl was. One of our 7<sup>th</sup> graders grabbed his axe and ran to join the fight, where he got hit with a rock, but thankfully nothing serious...he's currently getting a serious consequence from the school. As it turns out it was the military firing in the air to break up the fight, there was a handful of people injured from arrows, rocks and machetes, but thank God no deaths.

The next few days were tense, there was a lot of talk of going to war with Dogobak again, which could have been really bad for our school, one of our elementary schools is in Dogobak, and our students, we have roughly 30 Dogobak students here in Bokondini. I know some of you were praying, and I want to thank you all, the situation has now calmed down here in bokondini, it seems like war with Dogobak again has been avoided. Also if anyone wondered what family feuds were like besides reading Huckleberry Finn, this is a great place to experience it, it's just tribalism. Please continue to pray for peace here, and for people to learn how to handle problems in a healthy and Christian way instead of war parties with bows and machetes.

God bless you all, and may he cause the light of his face to shine upon you,  
Sincerely,  
Elijah



*Morning fog rolling up from the river*





*Fun Night activity: Husbands do wife's makeup without any instructions on how to use the myriad of strange sponges, brushes, and what appears to be feminine instruments of torture*



*Anas, Me, and our student Weminus' father at the Eragayam Bazaar*



*Our school truck, Martha, returns triumphant from the Eragayam Bazaar loaded with staff and their spoils of war...groceries, snacks, and other loot bought from our Eragayam students and families*