

## Update

December 25, 2007

Merry Christmas yupela!

Well, it has been another eventful two weeks. Little by little I'm starting to feel more settled into my new life. Here's a "brief" synopsis of my adventures of the last two weeks, though I'm finding every day is a new adventure. Again, you might want to take it in bite-sized chunks. I didn't experience all this in one sitting, so don't feel like you have to read it in one either ;-)

**Working at the VCT Center-** I've continued to try to spend at least a few days a week at the VCT center. It gives me a chance to get to know the UTB members a little better and practice my tok pisin (pidgin)

**Trips to Amapyaka and Hagen-** Every week or two, I spend a day traveling to Amapyaka (so I can use real internet) and Hagen (for everything else in life—mail, food, banking, fabric, hardware, etc.). You don't realize how easy we have it in the states until things were no longer readily accessible. Life here moves at a **slower pace by necessity**. If I want to use internet (other than emails on a radio modem), it will take about half a day with travel, plus set up and morbidly slow connections. If I want yogurt, jam, granola, or cookies, we make them from scratch, in large quantities. If I want a cabinet for my kitchen or a lamp for my room, Dr. Steve and Anton will have to build them. If I want curtains, Julie or I sew them. All of this is further complicated when we are without electricity, which has been a frequent occurrence recently. We even had a blackout during the Christmas Eve service. Thankfully we were able to get the generator up and running so we could finish the service. Definitely a different way of life.

**Forming relationships-** Much of my time has been spent visiting with people. One of the nurses at the hospital named **Catherine** has kind of taken me under wing. I've really enjoyed visiting with her at her house and she even made me a beautiful meri blaus to wear for Christmas (the traditional dress around here)☺. I also spent part of one day meeting **Bishop PISO** (the head of the GLC- Gutnius Luteran Church. Kinda a big deal. The GLC is similar in dimensions to the LCMS, so it would be kind of like meeting President Kieshnick.). I've also had a slew of **other visitors**. Because no one has phones around here, people will just drop in for coffee at the oddest times.

**Christian Conference and community-** Anton was invited to speak about the Reformation, Theology of the Cross, and HIV at a Christian conference being held at a small church further out in the bush, and I got to go with him. It was really great to **get out into the community** and see how people there eat and live. However, my ignorance and "whiteskin"ness made yet another appearance during this particular adventure. At lunch, they handed me a piece of **sugar cane** as tall as I was. I just kind of stood there and was like "Thanks?" Eventually, they figured out that I had never eaten sugar cane before so they cut it for me and stripped the outside. Then, to their amusement and mock dismay, I took a bite, chewed, and swallowed. I was quickly informed that you are supposed to chew it and spit it out. My bad ☺. So many new experiences and moments for **laughter**.

**Pets-** Tragedy struck the Lutz's house this week as one of the **Lutz's birds**, a parrot vulture named Andai, was **attacked by a dog**. Though Dr. Steve tried to patch him up, sadly he didn't make it. You were a good bird, Andai, and you will be missed.

Then, only two days later, the Lutz's **tree kangaroo** (kind of like a possum), Tango, **got loose overnight**. I was greatly distressed by Tango's disappearance, because I have come to love that little kapul. She and I have built up a certain level of trust, to the point that she'll let me pet her while I feed her banana peels. Thankfully, sometimes God answers prayers quickly. Within an hour of letting the Balab people (our neighbors) know that she was missing, someone spotted her. And then the hunt was on. She's a strong and fast little kapul, but we **eventually got her back** in her cage and no one was worse for the wear (though Dr. Steve did get a bit of a bite mark on his hand. Good thing he was wearing gloves). Never a dull moment at the Lutz house 😊

**A Bride Price-** The Lutz's and I were invited to a Bride Price this week. Whenever a woman is about to get **married**, her community/tribe will first prepare several pigs to send to the husband's community. Some of the meat is also distributed among those who help the family cook it. They gave us one of the most honored pieces- the liver! Actually quite tasty fried.

A few days later, the husband's community (it's always as a community) then gives a large amount of money, pigs, etc. to the bride's family in exchange for the bride. In a public ceremony, the bride and her parents will then **redistribute** the bride price among the community, paying back any debts the bride as incurred in her life and thanking people who have been a part of her life. So she pretty much has to look back on her life and think whom she or her family ever owed anything and pray she doesn't forget or offend anyone (And I thought American weddings were stressful!!). In this case, the bride's family was given about 45 pigs, a goat, a cassowary, and a large amount of kina, because Lona, the bride, is a well-educated schoolteacher. Surprisingly, Lona's family **gave Dr. Steve and Julie a pig** (the first time they have received anything in a bride price). We're still trying to figure out what to do with it and how to redistribute it to the community. Gifts here are rarely meant to be kept, and if they are meant to be kept, you will still end up giving back to the community in other ways. It's all about reciprocity.

I'm still not sure that I'm a big fan of the idea of a bride price, because I think it contributes to the idea that women are possessions that can be traded for and then used however you like. However, I am glad I got to experience this ritual, and I love how the whole community gets involved in the event and how the wealth is redistributed. It seems to me that in the states we also redistribute wealth at weddings. However, our wealth goes to florists, bridal shops, print shops, photographers, etc. and often not really to the people we care about...hmmm...

**Tough stuff-** Now that I'm getting to know the community a bit better, in the last two weeks I've seen more of the underlying pain. For instance, a **15-year-old girl** came to the VCT center one day to be tested for HIV because she had been raped three days earlier. It broke my heart to have to give someone that age the anti-retro meds, especially considering what she's been through.

On another day, as I was passing by the market, I witnessed clear evidence of the **domestic violence** that I have heard is so prevalent in PNG. A man had a woman by the hair and was

dragging her around the road. In PNG, women don't often get the respect they deserve and are frequently victims of abuse. The knowledge that I had little power to stop what was happening, especially because I was a woman, burned inside of me. If I had tried, I would likely put myself in danger and the woman would be beaten even more severely later as punishment for a white skin getting involved. I felt so helpless. Fortunately, there wasn't even a decision for me to make since I was in a car and the driver wouldn't stop even if I had wanted him to. Yet, the impression of that internal struggle remains.

Later that week, I went with Dr. Steve to the hospital when he was called for a second opinion. A man had been in a fight with a relative over housing materials of all things. Sadly **bush knives** had been involved (this happens far too often here). The man's right hand was now only attached by a bit of skin and a few tendons. The severed hands at Halloween are no longer funny if you've seen the real thing (if they were ever funny to begin with). I held the man's good hand as Dr. Steve told him the injured hand would have to be amputated. There was little more I could do. Yet, knowing how tightly he gripped my hand and seeing how he suffered from pain and the knowledge of what was to come, I'm glad I could at least give him a hand to hold.

**Making music**- Lately I've been reminded of how music can surpass language barriers and bring people together. My flute has definitely been a tool for that. I've started helping out with the **music at church**, I played along when we went **Christmas caroling on the wards at the hospital**, and I was invited to **play flute for a skit** that some of the children did on Christmas Eve. I finally feel like I'm able to give a bit back to the community who has been giving me so much.

I've also started my own little **hymnal project**. The PNG hymnal only has the words and not the music, meaning that even if someone was able to read music the PNG hymnal would be of little use. While I did find some of the same melodies that the Engans use in the American hymnals, I've discovered that a lot of them are too high for Engans, who are by nature altos (another area I stand out like a sore thumb). This adds to their discomfort with the hymnal. Therefore, I've started transposing the melodies in the American hymnals to use in church. I'm hoping to eventually get these hymns in a form that the Papua New Guineans can use. Even a consistent starting note would be an improvement. 😊

**Making progress**- Speaking of improvements, I'm finally starting to feel like I'm making some progress in many aspects of life. My **pidgin** is still stunted at best. I hate the fact that my people often don't get to see parts of who I am, because I sound like a four year-old. However, I'm at least understanding more and more of what is being said, and many pidgin phrases now pop out of my mouth with ease.

Also, the other day, I went for a Lutz **hike** and didn't fall! Not once. 😊 That's not to say I'll never fall again. However, slowly but surely, my muscles are adjusting to the strain and the altitude and are becoming more agile.

I'm also finally able to put a few more **names and faces** together as well. I think that's been and will continue to be a challenge...so many new names and faces. Plus, here I am without the

benefit of identifying people by features like hair or eye color. I didn't expect that to be a transition, but I find that it is.

The Lutz's are also doing a fantastic job of helping me **break out of my comfort zone**. For example, I'm working on conquering my fear of snakes with their five pet snakes. And who do you think they got to kill the chicken they got as a Christmas present? That's right, yours truly (I have a greater respect for my food now). Gradually this city girl is becoming more and more of a country girl.

**Christmas-** I've spent a lot of time the last two weeks getting ready for Christmas...decorating the Lutz's house and my house, making Christmas cookies, wrapping presents, and helping to make the house ready for various parties and celebrations. After Christmas caroling at the hospital, we invited all fifty participants back to the house for a little Western style **Christmas party** with cookies, coffee, and tea. It's been a while since I've seen a house that packed. ☺

Then, on Christmas day we went to the **Christmas service**, which lasted **four and a half hours**. Actually not that bad considering they squeezed in an hour of worship music at the beginning, a traditional service in both pidgin and Engan, the baptism service, the confirmation service, a renewal service, communion, and a time to give pastors and other workers of the church their Christmas gifts. Definitely a marathon though, especially since I was there for an additional half hour to help prepare the music.

Then we went to the **home of Joseph**, our gardener and friend, to celebrate with his family the baptism and confirmation of two of his sons. The food was tasty, though I'm still waiting to see if I will "live in remembrance of this meal." Food sanitation and preparation here isn't quite what it is in the states.

So here it is, the afternoon of Christmas Day in PNG and soon Christmas Day will begin in the states. I hope you all have a fantastic Christmas and New Year's celebration. Please enjoy my share of the candy canes and eggnog. If you have a chance, jot me an email. I'd love to hear from you. I love you all very much and am thinking fondly of you this Christmas.

With love,

Linda

P.S. I just realized how ridiculously long this update has gotten. Sorry about that. Next time I'll use more short phrases and less full sentences;-)