



PO Box 1765, Grass Valley, CA 95945
530-272-8170

www.piministries.info piministries@ncws.com

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Dear Co-worker:

You will remember that we are writing another book for New Guineans titled *Heroes at the Ends of the Earth* as a sequel to *With All My Heart*. One of the chapters we are calling "Ready to Give Up" is about Martha's ordeal in 1965 pushing a canoe with others for five and a half hours through floating grass that used to plague Sepik Basin dwellers. Here's her story.

Sally was going to be alone in the village of Wagu with her children while her husband, Wayne, was going to help build a missionary guest house in Ambunti. Here is my tale about my trip to Wagu and my stay with Sally.

Wayne arrived by canoe in the early afternoon to take me to the village on the Wagu Lagoon southwest of Ambunti. Wayne said the stream was full of grass and the mosquitoes were so bad that he was thankful he did not have to bring Sally and the kids out.

At first it was a beautiful ride speeding down the wide Sepik River, but we soon turned off the Sepik into the small stream that leads to Wagu. The waterway was blocked with a mass of floating grass and we had to fight our way through it. The humidity, heat, blazing sun, and hordes of mosquitoes were near unbearable. The motor was useless, so we grabbed our paddles or jumped out of the canoe and pushed and pulled it through the blocking grass.

Slowly and ever so slowly we struggled on. The fierce tropical sun beat down. The heat was more than I could take. But we couldn't stop or turn back; we wouldn't make it before dark. So we kept pushing and pulling the canoe in spite of all. Never before had I experienced such a miserable time. The worst part of the trip was the mass of hungry, buzzing, and blood sucking mosquitoes.

When we were about half way I felt forsaken. After two hours they said we had more than two hours to go. Could I survive? I was miserable, tired, and ready to give up. But it made no sense to turn back. Hearing we had more than two hours of this before we reached the village, my only comfort was that I was saving Sally and the children this wretched trip. Now I understood why Wayne did not want to take them through this hardship unless it was truly an emergency. We continued to push on, trusting that the Lord would help us in our trouble. He did.

After 5 ½ hours we came out into Wagu Lake. What a pleasant relief! We soon crossed it and arrived at the village at 6:45 pm. It was just getting dark. The next day Wayne headed back to Ambunti to help the fellows build the guest house. I learned that the difficult trip was only the beginning of a



Floating grass mats impeded the transport of personnel and supplies.



very exciting and rousing visit in the village.

One day Sally and I saw a fight start; the people were gathering with bows and arrows and were ready to shoot at each other. Sally saw the fight was getting out of hand; surely they were going to injure each other. So she ran out into their midst to stop it. I was afraid for her as she ran shouting right into the centre of the fighting. Seeing Sally, however, they quickly stopped. At that time the Australian government had very strict control over village affairs. The people understood there was severe punishment for those who violated the laws. And since they knew the consequences of harming a missionary, the fighting quickly ceased.

A couple days later a frightening storm rose on the lake. A strong wind came up and Sally and I could barely lower the tarps covering the screened wire windows in time to keep the heavy rain from pouring into the house.

In the middle of the night we heard a loud crash. In the morning we awoke to find the 55 gallon drum of rain water had fallen off its stand. This left us without the drum of water, but we did have enough in the house to get by with the cooking and drinking. But all the time I was in Wagu I was dreading the return trip to Ambunti to fight the floating grass, heat, and mosquitoes.

However, what I didn't know was that the Lord came to our rescue. We didn't understand what the storm and heavy downpour had done. It sent a flood of water through the stream which washed all the floating grass out into the Sepik and on down the river into the Bismarck Sea. What a relief! What a joy! The return trip to Ambunti was short, breezy, and wonderful.

As I looked back at my visit to Wagu, I knew God was surely at work helping us through our problems. The good thing about my difficult trip through the grass was that the children did not have to suffer from the hardship. Though we lost the tank with the water, the grass was cleared out of the Wagu stream. Also, Sally was able to save the Wagu men from any injuries in their fight. So many times on the mission field we saw God was at work to bring good things out of hardships and difficult situations.

A very interesting development has occurred in the Sepik Basin regarding the grass. All is completely gone! The areas that once were covered by floating grass are now entirely clear. Since 2010 all the waterways and lagoons are open water. What tremendous relief to have all watercraft move freely about in the oxbows, lakes, lagoons, and small streams connected with the Sepik River. You can imagine the relief it has given the villagers.

What happened? Biologists were hired by the government to solve the problem. After research they introduced a beetle to eat the salvinia, another serious plant threat that was encroaching on the lagoons, and a fish called the Pacu to eat the floating grass.

Miracles happen. God hears the prayers of those who put Him first. How nice it would have been in those early years to have not gone through those trials when we pushed our way through the grass that blocked our way. But I like to think that the grass removal was just one of the things that our gracious loving God had in mind that came with the spreading of the gospel in the Sepik. It is His word to us all that says He wanted to let the Sepik people know that with their general acceptance of His Holy Word he wants to bless and make living more pleasant and easy.

In His grace,

Orneal Kooyers

Format by Doug Heidema

The words of Isaiah come true!

*A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord. Make straight in the [swamp] a highway for our God! Every valley shall be lifted up. Every mountain and hill will be made low---The rough places plain, And the glory of the Lord shall be revealed.
(Isaiah 40:3-5)*