

Mark and Priscilla Heidorn return to Papua New Guinea 2016

It seems incredible, but true, that we had been gone from Papua New Guinea for 42 years. We were like many others who left the field and returned to the States to find employment, develop careers, and raise our children. Papua New Guinea was formative for us and always in our thoughts, but we did not envision going back. We had a bit of Lot's wife's lesson in us: keep moving forward and don't turn back, lest one turn into a pillar of salt. We loved hearing from those who had returned in recent years and felt a renewing relationship with our Papua New Guinea brothers and sisters who made the trips to the Mission Society Bungs. The idea was planted that maybe we could return for a visit.



Fifty years ago we were married at Amapyaka. Recently we discussed with our daughter and son how best to celebrate this occasion. Kevin said, "Why not go to Papua New Guinea where it all started?" In March we called Ron and Mary Ann Rall to discuss PNG travel. Their response was an invitation to join them on their trip in April. We did. It was a blessing.

Family and friends ask about the highlights of the trip. Beyond being nearly impossible to explain what it means to return, it's difficult to pull highlights from such an amazing experience. People everywhere we went were so gracious and helpful, beginning with the Enga congregation in Port Moresby and Timothy and Jennifer Pyakalyia, our hosts. Being with the Ralls is an experience in itself. Ron's gift for teaching and their faithfulness and interest in the Gutnius Lutheran Church is evident, and the Enga people respond with love, even in this time of church division. They and Ezekiel Peter made sure that we visited those places where we had lived.

We knew that the Pogera was a changed place because of the mine. The beauty of the valley is gone, the size of the population has ballooned, and the social order altered. But we were delighted to reconnect with faithful workers from so many years back. We had 8X10 photos made from slides, which helped us connect with former students and medical workers. And Pastor Pesa from Mungalepe (see photo above), who baptized our daughter Maria 48 years ago, is strong, alert, and continuing in his ministry, while living in our former house.

Priscilla was pleased to be back at Mambisanda again, and to see it functioning well. She was able to reconnect with Ezekiel's father, Peter, a former colleague, and Pam, the daughter of Pakaya, the head medical orderly when Priscilla was at the hospital. Pam is a teacher and the strong voice of what it means to be Lutheran at Highlands Lutheran International School at Ama-pyaka.



Our Journey was completed with a Brisbane stay with Gwen (Gessner) Horsfield and a get together at Don and Gaye Weier's home with the Brisbane PNG contingent.

I believe it was Jim Mayer who made the comment that no one ever really leaves the mission field. Our experience attests to that.

Blessings, *Mark and Priscilla Heidorn*