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Dear Friends,

Villagers often give generously of their garden produce, live poultry, or fish to a speaker after a church event in a Sepik River village. The guest out of politeness cannot refuse what is given. It almost seems the villagers try to outgive their neighbors and fill the departing boat. Their gifts express their love and gratitude. When the speaker arrives home, there are more pumpkins, bananas, coconuts, yams, taro, or sweet potatoes than can possibly be eaten before going bad. Thus, the gifts get distributed and given away to bless others.

When my daughter, Michelle was six years old. We had several boxes with Christmas gifts sent from the US to the coastal post office in Wewak. Plane flights out to Ambunti were filled with passengers and their goods, so the chance of presents arriving in time for Christmas seemed unlikely. Michelle and her mom prayed at bedtime that they would come. To our surprise one last flight came on Christmas Eve Day. Jeff, a short-term volunteer went to the landed plane to help unload and Michelle was with him. A short time later, Jeff came into the office somewhat white-faced and stated, "there has been an accident at the airstrip." Nothing like getting my attention! The pilot had hurriedly set a box on top of another in front of the propellor, then not seeing it, started the engine - instantly hurling the box contents behind the plane. What a mess to pick up: clothes with slices, a plastic roller skate chopped in half, paper shredded like confetti, and some other things were spread without damage including some socks. Michelle remembers the socks and the repaired dress she received for that Christmas.

Many of us have childhood Christmas memories anticipating the gifts and then joyfully opening them. Old photos help jog those memories of Christmas' past. We realize too, very few if any of those gifts received a decade or decades earlier still exist. The real meaning of Christmas sometimes takes a while to filter through all the tinsel and glowing lights, finally we realize that the greatest gift to all mankind is the Christ child who came to be our Savior. This truth exists eternally.

The Pacific Island Ministries staff including all the coworkers in Papua New Guinea thank you for your support throughout this year. The generosity of your produce given has enabled our ministry to be a blessing in the lives of many.

Oh the Wonderful Grace, Douglas Heidema



Pink Poinsettias can grow for years into shrubs of remarkable height



Mother and child in front of the "stove" with pet hornbill. No flue or chimney means the smoke filters through roof thatch or an open part of the gable.

