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Dear Friends,

Even though this “thank you letter” breaks from the norm in length I pray that you will take the time to read and enjoy its rich content. For new supporters I offer this paragraph as an introduction to the village of Yatoam and Friedemann Urschitz. The Urschitz family of Austria came to PNG with PIM in 1998. The husband, Friedemann, had a link to the area as he had spent some of his childhood in the Sepik region as a missionary kid. Although family circumstances forced them to leave the missionary field, they have returned for visits/ work projects throughout the years. One of those “projects” for Friedemann has been the village of Yatoam where he was the first expatriate to ever visit. The Lord has placed it on his heart to reach out to this remote community and the community now has an airstrip, a community health clinic, a school and a church. As you will read, it is not an easy trek into the village. The airstrip (and thus any contact with the outside world) has been closed for some time and on this last visit to PNG Friedemann knew that he could use his influence and a visit to help open the village back up. (transcribed by Penny Schering from memory after a dinner conversation)

Enjoy,

Michelle Hawkins



Friedemann and Mark Titus (a church elder and Station Manager from Nungwaia) were dropped in Sisemin on Saturday. They met up with the big group from Yatoam, who had been waiting for days for Friedemann to get there, and started hiking that day. They reached a village Kianu and overnighted with 30 of them in one house, pigs and dogs mingling among the people. The next morning they all rose around 5:00 am, had a worship service, and started out around 7:00 am. It was mountainous, a lot of ups and down. The Yatoam’s had come through and cleared the trail. For them it was all right; they are fairly short. But the stooping and bending Friedemann had to do soon wore him out. His companions saw his hardship and slashed away at brush and vines trying to make it easier for him.



More than once he had to slither along the ground through an opening less than 12” high. To squeeze him through some helpers pushed, some pulled and some scooped out dirt from underneath him. Much of the trail followed along a fairly wide river with a strong current. They ended up crossing the river many times, often holding bags above their heads as the water rose to their chests or necks.

Near midday the thread on Friedemann’s shoes completely dissolved and his soles detached. He felt the sharp stones dig into his feet. He called for another rest break—which none of his fellow-hikers ever needed—and a couple resourceful people attached the soles with jungle vines. He hobbled forward; his feet were

protected, but now he was more prone to slip. At many points along the way when he was obviously struggling and tired, the Yatoam villagers gathered around him and said, "Let's pray for him. He needs prayer." Friedemann was so surprised to have them initiate prayer for him. He had never experienced this before. A couple hours into the afternoon, when nearly half the hike remained in front of them and it became obvious that Friedemann was exhausted, the Yatoams decided to build a raft for him. After a little time of cutting a few logs and tying them together with jungle vines, they set Friedemann on his carriage. A couple men hopped on with make-shift paddles and off they went. At times they would have to dismount to get the raft over stones, other times they were in fear of tipping because of the river surging through a narrow opening. Once their precious passenger fell off, but they quickly retrieved him. Mark Titus came behind, shooting a couple videos and pictures of the process and then packing the cell phone safely away in plastic when it began pouring rain. In the rain, at 8:00 pm the party arrived at the village of Yatoam, a little the worse for wear, but so happy to have arrived safely.



Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, after a worship service to start the day, every able-bodied villager joined in working on the airstrip. Mark Titus had given directions for improvement last September. The villagers had done all he said. Now Friedemann saw other repairs that were needed—first of all, gravel the river had dumped on one end of it had to be removed. They worked hard hauling it away and digging the drainage ditches deeper on each side of the airstrip and cutting trees and bushes at the approach of the airstrip.

In the back of everyone's mind, was the difficult hike back he had to make at the end of the week. Could he even make it against the current of the river? Those in the worship service prayed earnestly that the airplane would be able to land to take Friedemann and Mark Titus back again to Wewak. They desperately worked on the two-way radio for three days but couldn't get it to work. Besides all the electronic parts to be in order (he had brought some new ones with him), he



needed the sun to shine enough to get the battery charged. Thankfully, Thursday morning he was able to transmit and made contact with the pilots. "Yes," they would try to land on Friday. Friday morning Friedemann waited for the sun to come through to connect again and give the pilots the final okay about the weather. "Lord," Friedemann prayed, "please help the sun to shine. I am ready for Your will, but I would really like to fly out." At the last minute the sun broke through and the plane landed safely amid shouts from the villagers, the two pilots got out to thoroughly inspect the airstrip, walking the length of it and peering at drains for half an hour. The whole time a group of ladies who had prayed danced around the airplane, praising the Lord and delighting in the answer to their prayers. Their cries had been heard!

One final word: After Friedemann arrived in Yatoam, villagers took his shoes, sewed the soles back on with a needle and nylon line and returned them to him. European shoes, strong and sturdy to begin with, came apart in the hard terrain of PNG, but resourceful villagers far from civilization restored them as good as new.