

## **WILD PIGS, RIDES AND CUTS IN MINDANAO**

We departed from Iloilo to Mindanao aboard the Fokker 50 plane and arrived in General Santos City about 2 hours and forty minutes later. There are two weekly flights direct from Iloilo to General Santos, on Tuesday and Sunday. General Santos has a new airport, but it is still in the stages of development.

In General Santos, Pastor Mario Locsin, one of our Bible school graduates, met us. We went to Lea's Pension House, a place he had selected for us to stay the night before the mountain and the night after the mountain. Prices were 450 pesos (USD \$15) for the economy double and 250 pesos for the standard single.

After we washed up, Hugh Taylor and I left Regina and Sue to rest and went to a believer's house to make plans for the next day to the mountain. On the way back we stopped and got some water and supplies for the mountain.

Jerry Andigan, another of our graduates and pastor of a new work in the jungle, showed up at the hotel and we talked a while about the work. He had come down the mountain the previous day and arranged for a truck, an old military weapons carrier, to carry us from Isulan to Tulale. We rested and met the vehicle to Tulale downstairs at 5AM the next morning.

Raphael drove all of us to Isulan, a town about 70 miles northwest of the city at the foot of the mountains. We went to the place where the truck was to meet us and we found out that the owner "had an emergency" and therefore the truck was not available. Nothing new!

We drove over to the market area and after some discussion, a large six-wheeled vehicle was declared to be our new transportation at a price of only 1500 pesos round trip. The original truck was to have cost 2000 pesos, so we were assured the new truck was a bargain. Everything was "better" than before even though we had wasted three hours finding a new vehicle. However, before we left I was told the price was 2000 since the first truck owner had contacted this one to help us out.

We noticed this truck was loaded with supplies and rice for the people and little shops along the way. We made about 15 stops up the mountain and it became clear my 2000 pesos was just extra money for the driver at no cost to him. Sue and Regina rode in the cab with the driver. Regina wondered the whole 3-hour trip why her seat was so warm. Come to find out, she sat on the driver's hot rice lunch all the way up the mountain. Hugh, Roger, Jerry and I rode in the open bed back on sacks of rice with about twenty other hitchhikers.

We arrived at the top of the mountain but still about 5 miles from Tulale. We stopped at a guard station. This is a guard who works for a Chinese man who has bought thousands of acres of land throughout the mountains. Without permission no one goes up

the road. The man is cutting the forest but we have no interference in the political or ecological issues in the PI.

Susan Andigan, our Bible woman in Tulale, has been going to the Chinese man's house where the foreman and workers families live. She is teaching them to read and giving them a gospel witness. Because of that, we can pass.

Unfortunately, when we arrived at the gate, a guard not familiar with the orders from his boss was on duty. We had to wait for him to radio his headquarters in Isulan. After a 30-minute wait, he lifted the gate and we went to Tulale.

We arrived in the village at 2pm. The truck was to stay overnight and leave the next afternoon, collecting sacks of corn along the way from various farmers to trade for rice and other products in town. After exchanging greetings with our graduate and pastor, Franklin and Alma Principe, their children, Alfran and Ivan, Virgie Edisani and Susan Andigan, our Bible women, and Melchor Soliva, Franklin's assistant, we had lunch of bananas, rice, and adobo chicken.

The children played and sang as they remembered us from previous visits. We were impressed with the neatness of the mission houses and church even though they were in the jungle. Flowers were planted all around the church and houses. Boganvilla, African daisies, Roses, Impatiens, marigolds, orchids, along with several plants noted for their medicinal value in teas and poultices, covered the area.

We rested about an hour and prepared for the prayer services at the church. Hugh Taylor spoke and I spoke. At the invitation 22 people came forward to receive Jesus Christ as their Savior. Hugh spoke on the will of God. I spoke on Romans 5:19: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." I was determined to tell as much of a story as I could, beginning with God creating man, man sinning and Jesus coming to pay for man's disobedience. Roger Bayona interpreted as I preached. So I spoke simply and concisely.

The lights in the building—two of them—were on for the special occasion. The gasoline corn sheller was started and its alternator powered the 12-volt lights. The dirt floor, bamboo pews and open windows gave a special flavor to this prayer meeting. I noticed the people listened intently to the message. Only one or two Bibles were among all the people.

That evening, after services, we had a special meeting with all our workers in Susan Andigan's house. We read the Bible by the oil light and prayed for the work of reaching other villages with the gospel. We all settled for the night. Sue and I in one of the small 8' X 5' rooms of the nipa hut, Hugh and Regina in the other, and Susan and Virgie in the front room.

As Sue and I lay on our backs on the hard rattan mat, I switched on my flashlight in order for us to check the thatched roof above our heads for any unwanted guests.

(Susan had killed a snake in the other room a few days earlier.) Three things are quite essential before you sleep in the jungle—I've learned this from experience. One, know where you are and as much as possible, know what and who are around you. Second, close all your bags and leave nothing open for unwanted guests to crawl into. Third, be sure your flashlight is where you can grab it in a second. Sometimes, I simply sleep on it.

Soon the oil lights and flashlights were out and all was quite. About thirty minutes after all was quite, a lot of shouting came from across the way. We jumped up, pulled on our pants and ran to see what was going on. One of the men had killed a wild pig. He gestured how he had worn his flashlight (it was "supped-up" with two extra cells tied with wire to the regular four cells) on his head, taken one shot and got the pig.

We stood around while various villagers poked the pig, looked at his teeth, commented on how it was shot, and listened to the story told in T'boli for the tenth time. They reminded me of Alabama deer hunters, telling what they saw, heard, tracks in the ground, rubbings, and in general, spending more time talking about how it happened than actually doing it. I guess it makes the meat better. It reminded me that men are pretty much the same all over the world. After the news was told again and again, we went back to bed. There was a nip in the air and our long johns were not quite enough for the cold jungle night in a breezy bamboo hut. You feel so foolish hauling long johns around in your bags at the bottom of the mountains in 98-degree heat but mountain temperatures at night drop into the 50's.

The next morning, well before daylight, voices awakened us—not loud-but subdued. I was cold anyway, so I got up to stand by the fire as the men cleaned the pig, chickens, and turkey and the ladies prepared the other food for the Thanksgiving Day Service. Thanksgiving day is not as in the USA—it is simply a day set aside by the churches to give thanks for all of God's blessings. Usually, it would correspond somewhat to our southern tradition of "homecoming day." Former members come, a feast is prepared. One of the villagers from Pagunay (our newest work where Jerry Andigan is) had brought the live turkey. The gobbler stayed tied in a sack in the yard and constantly grumbled the whole evening until execution just prior to daybreak.

There were several instances when Sue helped the people with medical problems. Emelda Cajilig, one of the Bible women had been in the town at the base of the mountain and was returning to Tulale. The motorcycle had a wreck, throwing her and the others off and cutting her head. The cut was about 1-2" above and behind her ear. (Motorcycles driven by a man with five Filipinos on it is the standard way to travel up the mountain) Sue cleaned the dirt and pebbles out and, instead of stitches, decided to butterfly the cut.

Another case was a man who, a week earlier had cut the top of his foot just below the ankle with a machete. The foot was swollen, the 4" cut infected, and red streaks were running up his leg. Sue irrigated the wound, getting the pus out, applied Bactroban, and gave him penicillin. The next day, the streaks were gone and the foot swelling down. Sue probably saved his foot and possibly his life. He was going to tough it out as they do so many times. Several others were treated for fevers and respiratory infections.

The Thanksgiving Day services began with songs and testimonies. Roger Bayona preached and at the invitation, 12 came forward for salvation and 8 for full time Christian service. 4 of them wanted to go to Bible school at once, but 2 could not read. So Susan, our Bible woman, enrolled them in her literacy class she teaches 4 days a week. The others will attend our Bible school in November.

The people came in their tribal dress for the services. Some came from huts out in the jungle away from the village. Beaded clothing, strings of beads around the neck, 5 to 20 earrings in each ear, many small bells around their waist that tinkled as they walked, and combs or headdresses of many small, rolled beads in their hair, furnished their decoration.

Children were everywhere. Now there are about 80 children and we need to build a room where they can be taught while the adults attend services.

The feast was served after church services with lots of rice, boiled wild vegetables, and some manok (jungle chicken) and baboy (the pig killed the day before). All ate in typical rural Filipino fashion, with their fingers, some using a palm leaf as their plate.

We met the village leader and were informed that a month earlier she had gone to Manila to represent the tribal people in that region before President Ramos. He asked her to do a tribal dance, which she did. I saw one of these dances on my first trip to Tulale in 1996. He also asked her if they still worshipped the wild dove. She told him, no, that now they had a Protestant missionary and church. She also told him of the medical and literacy classes provided by our workers. Before we left she gave us an invitation to come to the village anytime. We were always welcome, she said. Her adopted daughter wants to attend our Bible school next year.

We got on the corn truck and I threw my remaining candy to the children gathered around the truck as we roared off down the single lane rocky road toward the bottom of the mountain. Sue and Regina were in the front with the driver and the rest of us were sitting on the sacks in the back. We stopped to pick up sacks of corn at several huts as we went down the trail to the town of Isulan below. We saw a cobra someone had decapitated lying alongside the road and had a flat tire in the middle of a thunderous downpour going down the mountain. 3 hours later we were in the town and thankful to see our truck waiting to carry us the next 2 hours to General Santos City.

That evening some dear believers invited us to dinner at their house. They wanted to hear of the mountain work. To many Filipinos in the cities, jungle work is very interesting to them. Many would never think of traveling to the mountains since Muslim rebels are everywhere, robbing or kidnapping anyone for ransom. We had chicken adobo, pork, a salad of melon, pineapples, bananas, and papaya with mayo along with soft shelled crabs and prawn and seafood soup. This was a real treat and I'm sure cost them a lot to prepare such a meal for the five of us.