

Highland Stories: Danika

My name is Danika Wetipo. I was born in a small village called Wesagenma just next to Hitagima. Iwigima is the next village over. I am the first child of three siblings. First me, then a second younger sibling, and lastly a third sibling. We all live together with my Mama. My Bapa's name is Charles Wetipo. We have a house at the edge of the Baliem River.

I don't know a lot about how my parents met, but Mama told me they came from different villages. She's from Sinakma and my Bapa comes from Pasar Baru area. Mama has family in Pasar Baru so when she was in fourth grade, that sounds young but she entered school late, she went to Pasar Baru to her family. My father saw her and told Mama's family, "Please tell her, would you? Tell her I like her."

Mama had gone home and the next day came back again. When she came back her family told her, "Someone gave us some news." Totally shocked Mama asked, "What news?" But Tete, my Grandpa, would only say, "It's happy news."

Mama's family they all cooked a meal and sat down to eat. While they were eating my Bapa came and stood at the back door, waiting and watching for Mama. As soon as Mama came into the house Bapa came right in after her. Bapa told Mama's family, "I like this woman so tomorrow we will get married. Don't let her go back to her village, she has to stay here."

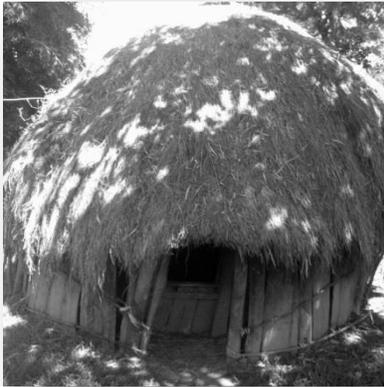
It's not a long process, they were immediately married. It's like that for us here. The very next day Tete and Nene, my Grandma, invited all the family to come for the wedding ceremony.

Back when my parents got married boys and girls didn't go out together, didn't need a long time, didn't get to know the other person's character. They just got married. I asked Mama how she felt about it and she said, "I was afraid. I was shocked. I wondered about his character and just thought whatever it is I'll know soon enough."

After the wedding my parents lived together with Bapa's parents. About one or two years later Bapa started to look around at locations and wondered, "Where should I build a house? In what place? I have to find the most suitable place for us to live." He looked around and two even three years later he built a house and they lived alone together.



In my village we live in loteng honai houses, two floor wooden structures with a thatched roof. There's a sitting and cooking area on the ground and when you want to sleep you climb the ladder, sleep in the top. The honai is made from wood and vine ties we collect from the jungle. When it's time to build a honai we invite the community and all build together.



honai entrance



kitchen fire pit



loft sleeping area

My Bapa had a lot of friends, lots from school too. So when he wanted to build a honai he invited the whole community to come, invited the neighbors nearby to all build together. Usually it takes two days to build a honai. You build the kitchen first, then other spaces, and then a pen for pigs. You build room by room making the house long, working all together for two days.

While the men build the honai the women cook bakar batu, a pig roast feast. The women heat stones and after the feast opens, while the meat is cooking under the stones and everyone is waiting around, there is usually a comedian making jokes about how to close the roof. Then it's the women's job to carry the long grass from the jungle back to the honai for the men to thatch the roof together.

When I was born, my Mama pregnant with me, we had a honai at the river's edge. The spring flooded. I was a little girl when my Mama told me the story.

I was nine months almost born when the water flooded and Mama couldn't give birth there. Our house on the edge of the Baliem River was covered in water.

My Mama brought me to a place far from there, Bapa's older sister's house, and I was born. The water increased, rising and rising until it covered our house, everything covered in water. No rain, just water from the river. The water stayed for one month before we could move back. It was a long time, long enough.

I grew up in that honai. When I turned 7 years old I started Elementary School Advent Maima for six years, from first grade to sixth grade. After that I went to Middle School at Advent Sogokmo for three years.

When I was in second grade, my Nene invited me to go with her to town. She's my mama's mama. In town Nene worked as a helper, cleaning gardens. She worked morning until noon. We took a taxi to the town and worked together until noon and ate lunch. I remember this time so well because afterwards Nene took me to the market and bought me a fancy dress. I felt so happy with Nene, even from when I was small. Mama didn't feel love for me but Nene always paid attention to me. If I wasn't at home Nene would roast sweet potatoes and save them for me. My first memories are of Nene. I'm always happy when I'm with her.

One memory I have until now, I feel it's a very important memory, is Tete and Mama going to the town to sell. Mama always carried the things she wanted to sell in her string noken bag. Since Mama carried a heavy noken, Tete carried me. We walked very far, about one hour, until we could get a taxi because in that time taxis were rare. When I got bigger Tete always liked to tell me, "When you were little, your Mama and me would go to the town. I carried you and Mama carried her noken." I'm always happy when I think about this.

When I was in still in elementary school my Bapa always gave me this advice, "You have to, wherever you are, wherever you are going, you must give a proper greeting to others. And it's not allowed that you dislike family. You must always greet them well, go together and eat together." These are my Bapa's words. He said to me, "You must become a blessing to receive blessings also. For your future if you want success, you must do well in school." He spoke this advice to me. It's important for me and I saved his words in my heart. I received them well. This was when I was in fourth grade, until now I still remember his advice.

When I was about 10 years old at school they told me to go home. My Bapa was in the hospital. At home I heard the story from Mama. I didn't see it happen. It all happened around seven in the morning so I was already at school, I wasn't there.

My older half-sister, she's from my Bapa's first wife, was already in middle school. On her way to and from school there was a boy, he always blocked her way and did evil to her. My Bapa was furious. He said, "It's not permitted to do evil towards my child! It's not allowed!" and he hit that boy. Hit him then hit him again and again.



Danika's little sister with Nene



Tete

Immediately the next day trouble started.

After passing two or three months, there was still trouble and Bapa went up to the village office to put an end to it, but he couldn't. The uncles wanted to murder right there in that place.

My Bapa turned around and headed home. An uncle named Wesa Asso he left there directly after my Bapa. He straight away grabbed a machete and swung it, sliced across my Bapa's neck and shoulder.

The uncles and elders in my Bapa's family called us out and we all moved church. The very day my Bapa was murdered my family and those loyal to us; we broke apart, immediately moved.

This all happened when I was 10 years old. When the murder happened I didn't know because I was at school, I just heard it from Mama. They brought Bapa to the hospital in Wamena, but they couldn't save him. He took his last breath in the hospital.

Before my Bapa died we all worshiped together with Bapa's uncles, his family. But when Bapa was murdered by his uncle, we moved. We moved church. The murder's church they stayed alone and we moved. The people split. Part of us moved to another place for worship and we opened a small church, we built a new church.



building project for the new church

Sometime later the leaders there put me to build up the church by speaking in the front. So I thought, "Oh my, Lord. Thank you!" There were people there who already graduated school and I thought about how I hadn't finished school. I'm nothing, I'm not good enough in Indonesian language, but the Lord gave me a position. I can serve there and I am overjoyed. My friends are there too, but the Lord pinpointed me for speaking in the front. I feel pride and happiness. And I think in the future I have hope, there is a better life than this. I can lead people, I think like this, so I feel happy because from when I was small the Lord gave work for me to do in the church.

About my Bapa's murder, in 2006 there was an old man in the village who said we should bring the matter to the office KODIM (Military District Command) for a settlement. His name is Jewi Asso. He said the one who had killed my father has to pay the fines. My Tete also had the same opinion because the cause of the problem, the boy who did evil to my half-sister, went to jail six months. That's not fair according Tete. Uncle killed my Bapa, so we also have to kill him. But Bapa's older brother said, "It is not good if we revenge. Everything has it's own time. Judgment is not of us. God's Word says it's not us who have the right to take revenge. Vengeance belongs to the Lord Jesus. He will reciprocate."

For me, it's Ecclesiastes chapter 3: "To everything there is time." When my Bapa was alive people liked to gamble, suck cigarettes, steal. I think it was God's purpose so we could build a church because there were a lot of people that didn't hear and didn't understand the Lord. So the Lord made a plan that we could build a church in the place we moved to.

I think my father is like a bridge for people to live better. For them to join what God's Word says, come to Jesus and enter heaven. So I agree for no revenge. If I see the uncle who murdered Bapa, I will greet him with good morning or good afternoon. For my mama it's still difficult. She looks away when she sees the uncle that killed my Bapa.

When I was a young teenager I thought, "What am I going to school to become?" When I walked to school I thought, "I want to be what?" I thought about it continuously. There is an urge in my heart that I have to make a good school for my future.

I thought I should go to nursing school to become a nurse. I liked the idea of being a nurse; I liked their clean white clothes. At that time I thought, "Oh later when I'm big, I'll become a nurse."

One night, while I slept in the honai, the Holy Spirit came and spoke to my heart, "My child, search for God's work and truth, everything else will be added to you." I was asleep but straight away awoke and sat up, "Who said this?" I asked in my heart. I was still sleepy and didn't recognize the Holy Spirit was speaking to my heart. Then a question appeared in my heart, "Oh Lord, who am I? I cannot serve you. What does it mean to look for your work?" The Lord answered me, "You can go to teacher school and serve me as a religion teacher, you can also teach Sunday School." But I thought, "Oh I cannot do it. My Indonesian isn't very good." But the Lord answered, "You have to search after God's work first, the rest will be given to you." Finally I thought the Lord doesn't want me to become a nurse. He has a different plan for my life.



Danika's sister in her school uniform

So I prayed, asking the Lord where I should go to school after I finished high school. The Lord truly answered my prayers. He led me so I can take courses to become a religion teacher and a Sunday School teacher. I am so very thankful to the Lord because my

life right now isn't going according to my wishes, but the Lord's wishes. The Lord already planned my future. I can teach children.

If we aren't doing something, aren't sharing God's word, it's like we're only spectators. So I truly give thanks. The Lord already prepared my future. I also join good seminars in church and join the discussions there. I give thanks for the many activities I can join, helps me understand a lot of situations I didn't know about.

Everyone has problems and challenges that must be faced in life. I am also the same. Whenever the time to pay school arrives, it is always a problem for me because I do not have any money. I always pray. I ask the Lord to help me. He always has a way to bless me so I can pay school money.

I believe in the Lord Jesus because he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." So in this world there is no other way. Believing in Jesus is the only way we can enter heaven and be saved.

When I was small I believed Jesus, but at that moment it was only believing and knowing about Jesus. I didn't yet really truly know him. I knew that Jesus had a mother named Mary, but I didn't truly recognize the truth and have a personal relationship with him. I believed in Jesus, but I did a lot of wrong things like stealing stuff from friends at school. But now I really truly know him and know God's word, I know that stealing is not allowed.

In my opinion, the most important thing in life is to be humble. On the surface I am just an orphan with no father, when I humble myself then I can receive blessing. Blessing for what I am wishing. It comes like a river, a river from a high place to a low place. So if we lower ourselves, humble ourselves, blessing from the high place will flow to us. Another thing is for me to become a blessing to other people. It's my greatest hope.

Before, I believed my life had no meaning. But when I learned to fear the Lord, I realized that my life in the Lord is important. I pray for my family, I pray also for the people in the place I work. I regularly pray for other people. With prayer I hope my family is saved, including my mama and my bapa. Even though they still sin, I pray so they can be saved.

I hope my future will be better than today. I also want to become a better person than I am now. What I sow today, I will reap in the future. So before I reach my future, from now I have to have a character that fears the Lord, loves others greatly, works diligently, and studies well. This is my hope.
