

# Introduction

Rebekah is the oldest child of Michael and Debi Pearl. Her homeschool days were continually interrupted with the busy atmosphere of a home dedicated to serving God and others. She grew up seeing the power of God at work transforming the lives of broken sinners.

At seventeen, having never been away from the protective environment of a loving home, she boarded a plane with several other young people and went to South America where she witnessed the power of God transforming the lives of primitive tribal people. She would never be the same. The following year, selling the family cow to raise the last of the money, the Pearls sent their eighteen-year-old daughter to Papua New Guinea. Eight weeks later she came home with a heaven born vision. She would go to linguistic school to learn to translate Scripture into the language of a primitive tribe.

After three years of preparation and much prayer, she boarded a plane for the Madang region of Papua New Guinea. She did not go out under a mission board. She was sent out by her local church. Her eighteen-year-old brother, Gabriel, went along as her “protector.” During their four week trip, God led them to the Kumboi people. They returned to the U.S. so she could get an extended visa and make preparation for residency in P.N.G.

She soon returned to the Kumboi. This time, with her seventeen-year-old brother Nathan went along as her assistant. After three months, he came home, leaving her alone on the top of a mountain among tribal people where no white person had ever been. She had no support team, and for the first few months, she had no communication with the outside world. There are no roads to the village. The only way in or out is a six hour hike from a primitive bush air strip.

This is her diary, as she wrote it, from the heights and depths of service to her God.

# Papua New Guinea, July

**July 9, 1995 [Rebekah, in the city of Port Moresby, just arrived in Papua New Guinea]**

*“Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.” Ps. 17:8*

It has been a full day. Mom just called. It is 7:00 in the morning there, and folks are praying for us. I am still trying to catch up on my sleep.

All the natives think Gabriel is older than I. He leaves them in awe—his height, I guess. The girls come up to stroke my hair and touch my hands. I had to sign my name in the front of nearly 50 Bibles. They are all musical. The guys play the guitar, and they all sing harmonies. It is beautiful. One of them thanked God he was born a New Guinean—born where he could hear the gospel and read his Bible. They are thankful, joyful people.

It is beginning to dawn on me just how dangerous a thing I am attempting to do. I see fear for me in the faces of the P.N. Guineans. Steve Lindsey [missionary there in Moresby] looked at me today and said, “You’re crazy. You are stark raving mad. You know they will steal from you, beat you, rape you, and make you wish you were dead, and then they will kill you. It is an absolute impossibility! The only thing that makes me believe that you will survive is knowing that it sounds just like something God would do. And if God is with you, who can be against you?” It gives me chills to remember his face when he said that. God help me. It is now 11:30 PM. Goodnight.

**July 10, 1995**

*“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.” Ps 17:15*

This afternoon, a New Guinean girl named Cathy came to talk to me. She is 25 years old, and got saved 7 years ago. For the last year, she has felt God wanted her to be a missionary to her own country, and she has been praying for a family or another girl to go with her. When she heard me talk about going to the Madang region, she said she thought, “God, could it be that you want me to

go with this white girl and serve with her?" She lay awake all night praying, and decided to talk to me. She wants to quit her job at the Post Office and go with me anywhere God leads. She speaks fluent Pidgin, English, and her own tribal language. She knows the Papua New Guinean culture well. The church in Moresby will support her financially. We have decided to pray for each other and correspond for a year. It looks to be God's perfect answer to prayer. I never dreamed I would have a Papua New Guinean for a partner. The Lindseys are thrilled. They say that Cathy has a solid testimony and walks righteously with God. All my weaknesses would be her strong points and all her weaknesses are my strong points. Tomorrow morning we will leave for Madang.

### **July 11, 1995**

I am sitting in the Port Moresby airport waiting for flight PX 210. The plane is late, as usual. Across from me is a native family. The little girl found some bright pink nail polish somewhere, and is now patiently painting the toes and fingernails of everyone in her family. Both her brothers and her dad have bright pink nails. How funny!

I hope the Williams will be there to pick us up.

### **July 12, 1995**

When we arrived at the Madang hanger, there was no one there to meet us. [They came after a while.]

### **July 13, 1995**

*"For thou wilt light my candle: the LORD my God will enlighten my darkness. For by thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall." Ps 18:28-29*

At two PM, Pastor Allen Gami Akij from the Simbai area came to talk to me. He speaks the Kumboi language and is an important leader among his people. Allen came out of the bush years ago and learned Pidgin. Then he got saved and took the gospel message back to his own people in the mountains. From what I understand, a few have gotten saved and a small church started. But they have no Bible, and almost none of them can read or write. Very few have even heard the gospel. When I told Pastor Allen that I wanted to translate a Bible in tok ples (tribal language), he got excited and asked Bro. Jerry in Pidgin, "Does this mean we will have a Bible in our language now?" So Monday we are flying out to the Kenanj airstrip and will hike from village to village and do a language survey. God is leading.

## July 17, 1995

*“He maketh my feet like hinds feet and setteth me upon my high places.” Ps 18:33*

I’m here! We took a small plane, 5 seater, single prop, turbo, for 35 minutes inland. We flew past the highest mountain in P.N.G., snow covered, mount Wilhelm. Then we landed on a small grass airstrip where about 150 natives were waiting. They loaded up our backpacks, put the food in their bilams, and we started up the mountains. And climbed up and up and up until I was sure we must have passed the moon and sun too. The villagers were peeking through the brush and climbing trees to see us. The girls would run their hands up and down my arms and feel my hair. I said to them, “Mi narapela kain meri, eh?” (“I’m a different kind of girl, eh?”), and they all busted out laughing. I was indeed another kind of girl than they had ever seen. The children hang back and stare with big eyes. We met a lapun meri (old woman) who screeched and crooned with toothless delight at our arrival. Another old man went off into an enraptured speech in Kumboi, “In 1975 we gained independence as a country. That year was the last time I saw a white man. Now I am happy to see white brothers and sisters.”

It seems that the only way out of here is 3 hours walk down the mountain to the airstrip, and then to fly out. Most of the locals have never left these mountains. Pastor Allen and his wife Priscilla have given us their house. It is made with woven bark and grass and is the nicest hut I have stayed in. Pastor Allen took us up to the top of the mountain. From this spot we could see the ocean and Karkar island one direction, Mount Wilhelm in another, and all the way to Mount Hagin in the other. I think we can see about one third of P.N.G. from up here. Allen offered me the land at this highest spot to build a house and live there while I study Kumboi.

## July 18, 1995

*“He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy right hand hath holden me up, and thy gentleness hath made me great.” Ps 18:34-35*

The people here are begging me to stay. They have promised land, a house, and plenty of help. I think the biggest need is a Pidgin and Kumboi dyglot and some literacy work—perhaps a school where the children could learn to read.

## July 19, 1995

*“Thou hast enlarged my steps under me, that my feet did not slip.”  
Ps 18:36*

It is really very funny the way these verses fall on just the right day. This morning we got up early and began walking to the Aikram village—down, down, down the slippery mountain bush trails. My ankles and feet were twisting and flopping like rubber, my arms flailing like a windmill, but I somehow kept my balance as we crossed treacherous landslides, mountain rivers, and tangled roots. After two hours we arrived in the little Aikram village in which no other white people had ever been. The ancient wrinkled bubus (grandfathers) crooned and rocked back and forth as they thanked us for honoring their village. They took us to a hut where we can stay tonight and then escorted us around the village. Children with bellies bloated with worms followed us giggling.

## July 20, 1995

*“The Lord liveth; and blessed be my rock; and let the God of my salvation be exalted.” Ps 18:46*

We had a really good day in the Aikram village. They taught me many new Kumboi words and laughed in delight every time I used one. Dirty black hands were continually feeling my braid, hands, and arms. Later I wiped the streaks of grime off of me. We walked to their gardens and watched the young men cut down a tree with a dull ax. Clearing land for a garden is a major job here. It is always on a mountainside, and the foliage is incredibly thick.

Last night, all the village leaders crowded into the small hut they had given us. Firelight gleamed on about 20, ancient, black faces. Dressed in loincloths, with an occasional shirt or shorts, they put National Geographic to shame. Long lengths of sugar cane were brought in, and they chewed and spat the clumps of white pulp into the fire pit. Pastor Allen began by telling them where I had come from, how I had gotten to this remote village, and what I wanted to do. They responded with enthusiasm. To have their own language down in writing!

On gnarled fingers, the old men counted off 16 villages and about 8 to 10,000 people that live in the neighboring valleys that speak Kumboi. I asked the old men, “If I come and spend half my life here working with your language, will you learn to read, or will I be wasting my time?” They were silent for a minute, then an

old man spoke up, “This is a good question. Us old men and women cannot learn to read, we are too old. The younger ones, the children will learn. This will be good for them. Then they can come home and read to us old ones.”

### **July 21, 1995**

*“Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O LORD among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name.” Ps. 18:49*

I am learning their names and faces. In fact, I even named one of them. A few days ago, some of the girls and I were sitting on a mat talking. I asked the name of one who was deaf. The other girls giggled and said that she doesn’t have a name because she can’t hear or speak correctly. She must have been in her mid-twenties and was very friendly. I said that I would give her a name, and they decided they also wanted new names. But I only named the deaf girl. I named her Leah and they have called her that ever since.

### **July 23, 1995**

*“The Heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.” Ps 19:1-3*

I decided to try to translate a verse of scripture into Kumboi, to give Allen a better idea of translation and to give myself some more exposure to the language. So with an English Bible, lantern, pencil, and notepad, we proceeded to try to translate John 3:16. Allen was ambitious and thought it would take no more than a few minutes, but for the first hour, we couldn’t get past the first phrase, “For God so loved.” Allen couldn’t think of the word for love. He would mutter one over and over and say, “No that’s not right.” Finally he said, “Simbiningi! That’s the word. Write it down.” And so I did. But today, with another language helper, I was going over a list of words, and when we came to the word for love, she gave me a totally different equivalent. So I read her the verse Allen and I had translated the night before and asked her if it was right. “Yes, that’s right,” she said, “For God so loved the world.” “But you told me another word for love,” I said. “What does simbiningi mean?” She looked confused and said, “It means love too.” “Can you explain the difference?” I asked. She thought a minute and replied, “Simbiningi is when a mother looks at her child that is hurting and says, “I simbiningi you. I love you, I have