

Finally at home

by
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DESCRIPTION

The missionary Dirk Kok and his wife arrived in Southeast Celebes in early 1920. This letter, written more than a year and a half later, describes their transition to a new post in Sanggona village on the upper Konawe River and some of the difficulties and encouragements they encountered along the way.

SOURCE

Kok, D. 1922. Eindelijk thuis. *Orgaan der Nederlandsche Zendingsvereeniging* 62:7–10. Original pagination is indicated by including the page number in square brackets, e.g. [p. 7].

VERSION HISTORY

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Finally at home

By Brother D. Kok at Sanggona (Southeast Celebes)

Yes, we say that with a sigh of relief. When you've been married for more than two years,¹ you're going to long for your own home. We had a house in Mowewe, but even there we were still living out of suitcases.

Yet we did not think we would be living in Sanggona already. You remember, the people were against our coming here.

That in itself is a common phenomenon that missionaries before us have encountered in other mission fields, and so it will continue to be, wherever a missionary will settle.

The opposition here however proved strong, because an earlier [p. 8] ruler, who had come back from exile for a few years, encouraged this resistance. He was very successful at this, as everyone was afraid of him and unwilling to oppose him.

He spared no one and nothing, which brought him down at last. He was indicted, an investigation followed, and now he's been banished again and will never return.

With his banishment, the opposition was as good as broken. Overnight the people changed, they no longer stayed at a distance, and they went to get planks for us.

Previously men from Pehanggo had gone to get beams. Some of the young men in our service made a barn, so that when the beams were brought in, they could be stored away.

The trees grow on the slopes of the mountains. There the trees suitable for beams and planks are selected, and processed on the spot into beams or planks.

Once there is a suitable number, they are dragged down the mountainside and taken to the barn.

Here the Bugis carpenters cut the beams and planks evenly and to size.

When Ds. LINDENBORN² came in May, I was here in Sanggona and my wife and child in Mowewe. So I went to Mowewe and thought our house would be framed when I got back.

¹ [translator's note: Dirk and Dean Kok were married on July 3, 1919.]

² [translator's note: Director of the Netherlands Missionary Union (*Netherlandsche Zendingvereeniging*, NZV).]

As long as the house was still not standing, I inhabited a cottage, built by men on the orders of the lieutenant governor. In almost every village one finds such a cottage. It is roughly assembled, very similar to the homes of the people themselves, but still a great convenience for travelling Europeans.

After the visit of Ds. LINDENBORN, my wife and I thought that we could move into such a cottage for a short time, so long as our house was not finished.

When we arrived back, we discovered that the frame of our house was still not yet standing, neither had the carpenters done much during the time I was away in Mowewe.

The place where our house now stands used to be overgrown with long reed grass that was nearly impossible to pull out of the ground, so hard were its roots. This reed has the height of a few meters. It took a lot of effort first to cut it down then to burn it. If only I could have put about a hundred people to work, everything would have been cleared soon enough. However, people were not available. I had to work together with two young men from Posso, whom I had in my employ.

It was a nearly endless task, with the three of us trying to knock down this reed grass. Yet we finally succeeded. It took us a few months. [p. 9] In the meantime, the attitude of the people had changed, because the former ruler had been banished and we could also get workers.

But now we had no money.

The Board cannot send us a large sum at once, we depend on the gifts which come in in Holland. So we've been struggling for months because there wasn't enough money. When there wasn't any money, we bought striped fabric, headscarves, white cloth, etc. from a Chinese merchant in Kolaka and told him that we would pay later. This man accommodated us, and so we had a means of payment. When money came, the Chinese fellow got his.

Even with the digging of a well we weren't yet thriving. We could get water, but not for drinking. The young men now fetched water from the river in empty petrol cans.

At the beginning of June we were able to erect the frame of our house, after which some forty people covered the roof with thatch.

Now the planks had to be nailed. One day there arose a violent storm of wind and rain.

The thatch roof of the cottage where we had set up our temporary quarters wasn't able to withstand such rain. When I came to my wife afterwards, everything was soaked through with rain to the extent my wife hadn't been able to prevent it. It soon became apparent she had a bad cold. Fortunately, we were soon able to move into one of the rooms of the new house. I gave the carpenters other work so that as long as my wife had to stay in bed she wouldn't have to hear the sound of hammering and carpentry.

For a fortnight my wife had to stay in bed and was then happily recovered.

Here in the mountains one always has to beware of catching cold. That's how I caught a cold in a moment. DRIES, our son, was also affected. He had severe coughing fits, which made him so distressed that he put his hand in his mouth. He lost a lot of weight and was very pale. He too was allowed to recover, thank God, and he's now back to normal.

Currently we have a dry spell and the climate is better. There's a chance it will stay this way for a couple months.

The carpenters are now working on the outbuildings.

The bathroom is ready. Something like that sounds so elegant in Holland, but here it is indispensable. In a cement bin there is water, which you splash over yourself with a dipper. It makes you feel so good!

The kitchen is nearing completion, after which the rooms for the [p. 10] young men will be built. First comes our house; after that the cottage, which we now inhabit, will be used for my work.

So we are now somewhat well established and making noticeable progress. Now that we're living in the village, our relationships are growing closer.

A man, who had previously said he would rather be decapitated than get wood for us, came to ask for medicine for his child.

The kapala,³ the village head, was in constant pain from a large leg wound, while all his joints hurt. He walked crookedly, leaning on a stick. He has been treated so that the wound has healed, and the pain in the joints will disappear if he continues to take aqueous iodine. He felt so good now that he went to Kolaka on foot, a distance of 75 kilometers, to attend the festivities in honor of the Queen's birthday. Only now is it celebrated, because in August there is still so much rain.

Just now the elderly and at the same time former village head paid us a visit. He brought us two pieces of meat from a newly slaughtered buffalo. He has two grandchildren under treatment. He came to get me a few days ago to take me to two of his grandchildren. They had a fever. He lives across the Konaweha River, so we had to cross over in a small boat, a hollowed-out tree trunk. I went there again today and the children were a bit better.

And still others come, with inflamed eyes, with wounds, and also one with a broken collarbone. My wife, who had been a deaconess, handily made a dressing. It would be a godsend for the man if he healed, and an encouragement to the other men to come.

³ [translator's note: From Malay *kěpala* 'head.']

My own medicines will come in a few months. For the present we draw from Brother VAN DER KLIFT'S stock.

There are several people who need to undergo a course of treatment for scabies.

So once again we have told you something of our work, and hope that in a short while we will be able to report that we are finally completely at home.