

Life is challenging but also rewarding

by Marcia Wak

16 May 2024



I am currently a final year female economics student at the University of Papua New Guinea, living in Port Moresby. But my teenage years were spent in my little village called Krupia, near Boikin on the west coast of East Sepik province. Village life was so peaceful, simple and less expensive.

Every morning in the village you would be woken up by the sound of birds chirping and roosters crowing. You would be amazed by the beauty of the dawn when the sun shines on the islands. The fishermen go fishing, the working people travel to Wewak Town, the school students crowd out the main road as they walk to school. Most of the female population without formal employment sell goods, including fish and betelnut, on the roadside.

I was a natural salesperson so during my free time and weekends and holidays, I usually hung out along the roadside with the group of women. Sometimes I travelled by minibus to Wewak to sell fresh green vegetables and fruit, such as bananas, paw paws and mangoes. It was a thirty-five minute drive from home. The main town market is built next to the sea. I went on Saturdays to sell the fresh produce because there were more customers.

For a young female like me, this journey required confidence and courage because it was risky to travel alone to the town market. However, because I am the eldest daughter, I realised that I had to step up and take responsibility for easing the financial pressure that my parents faced. My dad always told me that I couldn't just sit around and expect money to be given to me on a golden plate — that is not the way the world works.

My education journey commenced at St. Paul's Boikin Primary School back in 2009. The school is just twenty minutes' walk from home. Unfortunately, owing to the lack of good teachers, my dad was forced to transfer me to Yangoru AOG Primary School which is located inland in East Sepik, where my mum's parents lived.

I spent two years in Yangoru completing grades seven and eight. Life was challenging at first because it was my first time living away from my parents. I felt lost and abandoned during the first two months of study in that new environment despite living with my grandparents. But, as time went by, things changed and I

made new friends.

2018 was the turning point. I was surprised to hear my name was announced as the Grade Eight dux. I was in tears because I could not believe what I had achieved by myself, living away from home.

I felt very privileged to be the only Yangoru AOG primary student to be selected to attend Mercy Secondary School (Yarapos) in 2019. Like the well-known Marienville School in Port Moresby, it is the only girls' secondary school in Wewak.

Unfortunately, my life got harder once I arrived at Mercy. I was sick most of the time. I grew pale and thin. I was diagnosed with malaria and this disease disrupted my two years in Mercy.

I received medication from the school clinic but I was not committed to taking all of the doses prescribed by the doctor so I continued to get sick. Since I was a boarder, I spent time resting in the dormitory but it was hard. My parents sometimes managed to travel to see me after they heard that I was sick. I looked forward to their visits and the cooked food they brought from home.

I didn't let my health situation become an obstacle to completing my education. I was committed and responsible. I kept on pushing myself. I knew my parents were depending on me. My dad has always been my biggest supporter, and I thank God that he is part of my life. He often said, "Don't be like me, a St. Xavier Grade Seven failure". I always had it in my mind that if I failed, my siblings would be the greatest victims.

My firm and determined mindset sustained me during tough times. God has been so good to me and life rewarded me again with another dux award in Grade Ten.

I was selected to go to Passam National High School in East Sepik to continue Grades 11 and 12. It is one of six government-run schools of excellence that have been set up across PNG. Before going there, I planned to take up science. I bought all the Grade 11 science books. However, things did not work out the way I had anticipated. I almost failed my term one chemistry exam. I also messed up the tests and assignments. It was here I made one of the most important decisions in my life and changed the path of my entire career.

After failing chemistry, I decided to take up social sciences instead. At first, I was hung up on figuring out why I had to switch. I wasn't aware of any careers related to economics at the time. But luckily there was one economics teacher at Passam who explained simple economics concepts which inspired me a lot. As I reflected on it, I somehow made my peace. I realized that all things, either good or bad, happen for

a reason.

I was hoping to be selected by a university in PNG. My family was so excited when they saw my name on the University of Papua New Guinea list. I am the first person in my dad's family to be selected to attend a university. I can vividly recall that my dad could not express his joy when hearing that I was selected to study business and management in 2021. I was selected to do a Bachelor of Economics the following year.

I am hoping that I complete 2024 on a higher note by graduating from university. But I know this is not simple. It will again require commitment, perseverance, and determination. Life will always challenge us. Do not expect a smooth ride. If you are slacking off, know at the back of your mind that there are no free lunches. You must work hard to be rewarded. Do your best and God will do the rest.

*This blog was written as part of the annual Summer School funded by **the ANU-UPNG Partnership**. The Summer School allows the top ten students from the University of Papua New Guinea in the Economics and Public Policy Management streams to undertake a month-long program at ANU to further their academic and analytical skills.*

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