

A photograph of a woman in a white t-shirt and pink shawl carrying a child on her back, with another child in the background. The woman is looking back over her shoulder with a serious expression. The background is a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage.

# West Papua Free!

Volume 2

Frans Welman

# WEST PAPUA FREE!

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Land of 700 peoples colonized by Dutch and abandoned by the international community. Now colonized by Indonesia.

**Text & Cover by** Frans Welman

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## INTERLUDE: BACK ON BIAK

Without further ado Johan jumped on his motorbike and rode off.

Inside the terminal chaos ruled. A handwritten signboard was held up stating the flight was delayed. As a result people were pacing, cursing, phoning and shouting, thus giving the check personnel a hard time. More so the Indonesian looking people than the Papuans shouted and cursed. I was surprised at the turmoil and knew when a plane failed to arrive there was nothing much that could be done than waiting for further news. No passenger action would enable the responsible people to get the plane down here. As he could be waiting in vain I wondered if I should call Dikey. On the other hand, I was sure he would not mind or would know about the delay. So, as an alternative to pointless waiting I checked out the surrounding of the terminal and the terminal itself. There was not much to be seen and so I sat down to read. An hour or so later there was an announcement that the flight would come in, weather permitted. Moments later the rain stopped and it cleared up. Three hours after scheduled time the Twin Otter landed and people dashed to the departure gate like the plane would leave right away. Already with a boarding pass, I waited for things to come, but I could hardly understand the eagerness of certain passengers when staff made the announcement the plane was ready for boarding and a mad scramble followed. I boarded as the last person and soon after we took off. Airborne now, I saw the island of Yapen quickly disappearing until we hit the clouds. It happened slowly like it faded away and had never existed like in a dream or perhaps a fairy tale. The flight was short and so I did not have much time to think about that. When approaching Biak the clouds vanished and I saw, Biak, in full size now, bathing in sunshine. The difference was exasperating and I told Dikey this as soon as we had landed and disembarked.

“Yeah well,” he said, “Yapen is known for that kind of weather. You were lucky enough to have a full nice day there man, “let’s

go home for your briefing and tell me about your experiences.”

Biak airport was named after Frans Kasiepo, a Papuan leader of Biak and the uncle of my friend in the Netherlands. Viktor was an exiled man and could not go back home to his native Biak. So, just to surprise him, as a remembrance I took several pictures. While leaving the airport I noticed Dikey carefully scanning the terminal before he decided to leave to start the engine. So, back home inquisitively I asked him about this:

“Well,” he answered, “while you were away there were some encounters and so it is good to be a little precautious. I do not fear anything will happen to us, but I liked to see if we receive special attention,” he explained as I nodded in understanding. Then he handed me an envelope and encouraged me to open it. When I did I found a Garuda ticket with destination Jayapura and date, next day early morning, on it:

“So, I am leaving tomorrow then?”

“It is all arranged,” he confirmed, “you will be meeting people in Abepura, close to Jayapura; the airport is nearest to Abepura anyway. The addresses and names of people you find in the envelope too.”

I checked and all was there as he said.

“Now you have only today here and of course perhaps a day or two on your return. So, if there is anything you wish or need to know we can use this day to get that settled and out of the way.”

“I have no idea what to expect in Jayapura but I don’t know much about the Baliem valley and I should know lots more.”

“Aaaiiiii,” he exclaimed pulling his hair in disgust, “I forgot something. I should have gotten you a contact there. Wait!”

He ran over to the phone and when connected he talked in his own language, rapidly. I looked, not understanding of course, but tried to catch a word. When he had finished, he smiled and said:

“Look Frans, there is a family member living in the capital and they are willing to take you in for a couple of days, but you do have to pay something for the lodging and for food. If you are

willing then you can stay there. I am sure they will not charge you too much man and besides you are rich,” he smirked.

“What?” I exclaimed but laughed too because he was pulling my leg, “you are actually calling me rich? Are you crazy? I am happy to pay what is needed Dikey, it should be the cost to enable us to do the things we need to do, but rich I am not!”

“Well compare to us you are,” hahahahahahahahaha,” he laughed out loud and could not stop. I laughed along but then asked:

“You concluded that and that is all there is to it?”

He liked to tease some more and went deeper.

“Yes you are filthy rich and very free. The freedom you enjoy is even worth more than money or anything else. What I mean of course is the richness in freedom. I envy you, man, that I want you to understand.”

“Yes from that perspective we are indeed and when you are free, especially when born into it, it is normal. What is normal is not appreciated, right?”

“Right, rich man,” he said and laughed again, “you are free in the sense of off duty today, unless of course you have some ideas I could work on with you, otherwise you just relax and prepare for your journey to Jayapura.”

“I can’t think of anything really now,” I said, “but I will prepare. Perhaps you have some books and articles on the Dani of Wamena for instance or on Lake Sentani?”

“Yeah, good idea, I will get you some,” he smiled now, that irritating almost sarcastic laugh now gone.

“Thanks,” I said “and I would like some coffee, hahhahaaa,” I continued in an effort to try and tease him now.

“Tuan besar (big boss in Indonesian) likes to have his late morning coffee served?” he reacted with a deep bow, as tried to keep a laugh inside, unsuccessfully for he burst out in a massive one.

“I admire your contagious laugh,” I said and chuckled loudly, “but I can make the coffee myself Dikey, or do you have an Indonesian amah around who can help you?”

Now he went hilarious with laughter slapping his knees for he realized that I knew about the housemaids called amah's who were quite common even among the middle class. Since Biak was a major administrative center with a huge military presence of course there were quite a few of those women around too. When he regained some grip he looked at me, but was laughing, and said:

"You can clearly do it yourself, so do it Frans!" he said followed by a salvo of laughter as I walked to the kitchen for the brew. In the kitchen then I suddenly realized and shouted to him:

"Do you want some too?"

"Of course, I thought you would never ask," he peppered me in and continued: "hey can you make a decent brew from our precious home grown and delicious coffee beans?"

I walked back to the living room, stuck my head around the corner and said smiling gently now:

"Do you have any doubt Dikey? For if you can brew well, perhaps I should let you do it?"

"Hahahahahahaha," he went again, "a nice try to get rid of your responsibility to serve me young man, now brew the coffee and make sure it is a good and not like dishwashing liquid, all right!"

"Don't tempt me to serve you that," I laughed, "milk and sugar?"

"Just one sugar like you," he responded.

"Okay then, I will be back in a jiffy," I smiled and disappeared.

A few minutes later I handed him the steaming cup and although he was reluctant he could not avoid a small compliment. Just as he was saying that, Rini entered and said:

"Hello, do I smell coffee?"

"You do indeed," Dikey replied, "he made a wonderful and special Dutch brew, you know, is there anything left Frans for my wonderful woman?"

"There is Dikey I anticipated you would like a refill, but now you will miss that for it goes to Rini," I said and I went back to the kitchen to fill her cup.

"Milk and sugar Rini,"

“No Frans, black is just fine.”

Sipping our coffee we talked ordinary things plus what I could still do.

“I will take you to friends nearby who run a sort of library you can snuffle in, all right, Frans?”

“Very good, when?”

“Any time after coffee, but now that Rini is here you should make some more, you know, you did promise a second cup,” he pleaded but laughed again.

“No problem man,” I confirmed and went to the kitchen.

“Are you pestering him Dikey,” Rini inquired.

“Of course,” he replied, “but do know that he can do that too, so no worries darling.”

“Does he? Is he capable of teasing you, so you quiet down?”

“Yes, I am,” I smiled from the door.

“Then I congratulate you, for that is not easy. Join the club,” she laughed.

I served them coffee out and joined. We reviewed then my journey to Yapen in short and when done Dikey came on with probing remarks which he knew would be answered in kind. We had a good laugh and Dikey said:

“Let’s go now for an hour or so. We can have some lunch when we return man!”

“Right,” I agreed.

We were received wonderfully by the people of the house, which was about five minutes away. One of Dikey’s friends there was doing research on culture and liked to talk about it. In no time his friends found what I was looking for in abundance. I had to be selective for I really could not read all of it this afternoon. They allowed me to bring three books and a few articles back to Dikey’s home which he would later return. Back in the house I dived into them and soon after was lost. Like I had to be woken up Rini shook me to tell we could have something to eat. While having lunch I asked them both:

“Have you ever been to Baliem?”

“I have family there,” Rini said, “the family you are going to stay with. They work for the local government, but they are not fat cats, so you need to cough up something. They are nice people though and I am afraid there are some charming young ladies living there too. They live close to the center, so you will have no trouble finding them.”

“I will go to Jayapura first and from there it is easy to get a flight out to Wamena?” I asked, not at all knowledgably about the frequency of flights.

“Normally that is no problem,” Rini answered, “there are several companies flying there, not just Garuda. Just ask and you will get there.”

“Right then I am all set then, I will read then and I invite you for a meal out this evening to show my appreciation to your hospitality and I like you to accept that invitation too.”

“Of course we will,” Dikey immediately jumped to the chance, “a free meal from a rich man? How can we refuse such treat?”

“I deliberately left the goal wide open and you jumped to head the ball in, now I close the net and you are captured Dikey,” I laughed.

“Ah indeed,” said Rini, now I see it with my own eyes. You are a club member!”

“Well I said, a tease is a tease is a tease and is meant to sharpen a little, just to tickle the brain. There is no need to play big and it is not a matter of winning and losing. To me it is also to feel good and to stimulate, see what is behind and to draw out as we can be vulnerable. Not meant to hurt,” I stressed, “yet many people seem to take offense easily nowadays, especially when authorities are concerned.”

“Right on,” said Rini.

“Yes, yes, yes,” Dikey confirmed.

“So you pick the place but I suggest a Papuan one and not a posh hotel?”

“You disappoint me now,” said Dikey, “that chance I wanted to have. I eat Papuan food every day man.”

“Then if you prefer we will have western or Indonesian food?”

“Sounds good, but we can pick a place where we can have both so you will have your way too,” Rini suggested.

“You know how to bring parties together,” I smiled, “no confrontation, no extrapolation, but looking for a solution satisfying both, thank you Rini.”

“Ahh, now you are mocking me, Frans, you are as bad as Dikey!” she cried out in laughter and with Dikey sitting there smiling.

I spent a couple of hours with the books which held my attention much longer than I had thought. They had pulled me in especially because the idea I would be visiting there soon. We returned the books later that afternoon, met some more people of that family, had a drink outside their house and was asked what I thought about the books. Written by outsiders, not Papuans, they were in the perspective of from the outside looking in.

“I think it is high time that Papuan scholars write about Papuan history and culture, not just outsiders who have their own frame of reference,” I answered and told them I was looking forward to begin the journey there but with the focus on how the past had its bearings on the present, how cultures survive, be it in adapted forms, but with their spirits alive and kicking.

“You see here on Biak the cultural transition has become more like adaptation, but at least in the mountains you will find Papuans, tribes, who still relish their expressive cultures. I would love to see that Biak too appreciates its roots, so the people will be surging back to authenticity. However that is not likely to happen,” the Nestor of the house, grand father of the family, remarked.

“I hope I will have more time on my return,” I told him, “I would love to talk more about these cultural matters. Especially when you think of what adapting to another culture has done to the self respect of people?”

“That is an intriguing topic and I will be glad to talk,” he replied with a twinkle in his eyes, “it is interesting to exchange views and I expect t you do not insist in seeing us as noble savages. We are people of stature!”

“You have jumpstarted,” I smiled,” and I think you are ready to question European points of view and fortify yours. You will be surprised though how close I feel with respect to self respect. That self respect is the basis on which to deal with people of other cultures.”

“Good topic,” he acknowledged, “I am looking forward to it.”

Later we had dinner in a small restaurant and talked and laughed.

“Humor keeps us going Frans. We face a serious long term situation, but we will not give up, not yet.”

“Strong motivation indeed,” I replied,”yet I cannot escape the notion that from the superficial looks of it most people are bowing to the inevitable. I feel kind of acceptance, an acceptance they cannot change, it is like they have to live with it; the powers around them being too strong?”

“That might be true,” said Rini, “but on the surface. What you do not see is what is happening underneath, what is brewing there. People adapt, because they have to live, people accept for they do not want to be punished when they show they are disgruntled. So, what you see is deceiving, the people are much more resilient!”

We continued talking along these lines but interspersed with sharp and funny remarks. It was a very nice meal and among Papuans for there was hardly an Indonesian to be seen in this Papuan restaurant. Yet Dikey and Rini had their Nasi Campur, mixed rice vegetables and meat with opulent spices, and I the sweet potatoes I desired.

“Time to prepare for your journey of tomorrow,” Dikey advised when we reached home and sat to wind up the evening.

“I am physically prepared and my gear is fine. It was a great idea to have me studying so that is in order too. So, all is well.”

“We will retire and see you early morning,” Rini announced