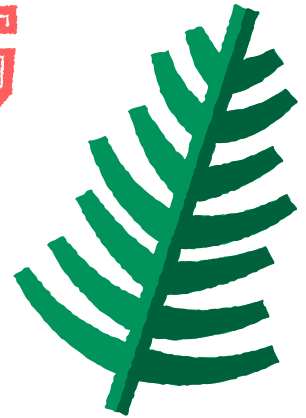


CHRISTMAS COMES TO THE KRONKEL

A STORY ABOUT HOW GOD TRANSFORMED THE SAWI PEOPLE



BY DON RICHARDSON, ADAPTED BY KAREN ROBERTSON

Following is an excerpt from [Treachery on the Twisted River](#), recently published by Pioneers. It's a young adult adaptation of the 1974 bestseller, [Peace Child](#). Both books describe how God led Don and his family to the world's second-largest island, New Guinea. They made their home on the banks of a river known as the Kronkel, the Dutch word for "twisted," to reach a tribe of cannibal-headhunters called the Sawi.

Until the Richardsons came, the five Sawi villages and surrounding tribes were often at odds with one another over past wrongs. Would their acceptance of Jesus as God's reconciling "Peace Child" be enough to overcome their ancient animosity?

A CHRISTMAS FEAST

Narrow dugouts carrying fifty Mauro villagers materialized out of the heat-shimmer on the surface of the Kronkel. They approached warily. Many years had passed since Yae's murder and the waves of retaliatory killings, but the Mauro were still nervous about venturing so close to Haenam.

This was Christmas—the day chosen for the first large-scale Sawi intervillage feast in living memory. The flesh of five pigs sizzled over cooking fires. Young girls thrust sharp sticks through thousands of squirming beetle grubs and toasted them in the flames.

Their mothers wrapped hundreds of slender sago loaves in *yohom* leaves for cooking. They struggled to make the day a joyous and festive one, but so many things seemed to get in the way—and the arrival of the Mauro villagers brought even more tension. Alone and solemn, Kani the legendmaker stood watching them from the edge of Haenam. Sensing his inner turmoil, Don quietly stepped up behind him and laid his hand on Kani’s shoulder. A soft morning breeze stirred the *kunai* grass around them.

“Kani,” Don said gently, “After all these years, at last, I have persuaded these men of Mauro to forget their hate and suspicion and come here to meet with you and your people on this ground. Now you...”

“Tuan!” Kani interrupted. “They are the very men who killed my brother. And they nearly killed me.” He touched the ugly scar left on his back by a Mauro spear. Kani had not forgotten Mauro’s treachery.

CAN KANI FORGIVE?

A pang of apprehension stabbed through Don. Had he misjudged the rightness of the moment? Perhaps Kani’s newfound Christian faith was not yet strong enough to hold back his former violent ways in a moment of temptation. The men from Mauro were nearer now, trusting in the assurances Don had given them. “Kani,” he replied, laboring against the sudden dismay welling up inside him. “I see your wound, and I understand the even deeper wound within your memory. And I know what your forefathers taught you to do to men who have wronged you, as these men have wronged you.

“But your forefathers never knew what you and I know, Kani— that the perfect Peace Child has been given, and still lives! Because of that Peace Child God has forgiven you, my friend. And because of that Peace Child, you also must forgive the men of Mauro.” Don waited for an answer, but none came, even as the sound of Mauro’s paddles reached the shore.

The Mauro dugouts swept past, heading for the mooring at the mouth of the tributary. Kani’s eyes narrowed as he watched them.

Don turned away from Kani with sadness and walked over to welcome the guests. As he approached the Mauro, he noticed they were looking past him at Kani and the longhouses of Haenam. They, too, were remembering the fateful day when Yae, their ambassador for peace, had set out for Haenam and never returned. The words of Anai’s dirge still echoed in their minds:

Oh, who will deal with the children of treachery?

Oh, what will it take to make them cease?

AMIO MEETS HIS ENEMY

By mid-morning, several hundred Sawi from a half-dozen villages had beached their canoes near the Richardsons' home and joined in with the guests from Mauro, Haenam, and Kamur. Tension between the tribes crackled in the air. Many of the visitors refused to mingle with those from other villages. Instead, they pulled apart into small groups, watchful and apprehensive.

Don sensed violence throbbing through the village. Before it had a chance to erupt, a long Kayagar dugout appeared from upstream. A group of young men followed Don to the edge of the Kronkel to meet it. Lying in the boat was Hurip, the Kayagar man who had shown the first steel ax to the men of Haenam years before. He was suffering from pneumonia, gasping for breath as Don knelt beside his dugout and felt for his pulse.

Before he had finished counting Hurip's pulse a voice—ominous and edged with bitterness—spoke from behind Don. “Tuan, you won't give medicine to that man, will you?” Don recognized the voice of Amio, Nair's son. Looking over his shoulder, Don saw that Amio's slim, brown body was trembling with emotion.

“You want Hurip to die?” he asked in surprise. “Yes,” Amio hissed.

Anxiously Don rose and faced him. He was glad that Amio was unarmed, but one word would bring his friends running with weapons. Hurip's Kayagar friends, meanwhile, gripped their spear-paddles tightly. They sensed trouble, even though they could not understand the Sawi conversation.

“Why?” Don asked.

Amio's voice choked with emotion as he replied: “Remember I told you my father once gave a peace child to the Kayagar, only to learn later that they had killed the baby and devoured it?”

Don nodded and Amio continued, “The man lying in this canoe is the man my father gave that child to. He is the man who killed and butchered my little brother!”

OVERCOMING THE PAST

Now Don trembled too. First Kani, and now Amio. Could the Sawi really forgive their enemies for Christ's sake? Somehow, sometime, they must forgive, but perhaps it was too soon... For a moment Don stood speechless before Amio, praying for wisdom. Then an old memory stirred. Reaching out with both hands, Don gripped Amio by his earlobes. The Sawi warrior was startled, but he did not draw away. He listened intently while Don said, “I plead the Peace Child!”

Amio shot back, “The peace child my father gave to Hurip is dead! Hurip himself killed him!”

“But the Peace Child God gave still lives!” Don countered. “And because He lives, you may not take vengeance against Hurip. Forgive him, Amio, for Jesus’ sake!”

Don still gripped Amio’s ears.

The conflict on the young man’s face raged to an almost-overwhelming intensity and then began to subside. Soon it gave way to a glow of new understanding. Eventually, Amio looked down with gentleness on his dying enemy.

Don released Amio’s earlobes and said as matter-of-factly as he could, “Amio, I need help to carry Hurip to the medical house.” With deep resolve, Amio squared his shoulders and said, “Tuan, let me carry Hurip alone!”

Two Kayagar lifted Hurip onto Amio’s back and watched in awe as the young man bore his semi-conscious burden toward the clinic. Following behind Amio, Don noticed someone else who had observed Amio’s change of heart—Kani. As Don passed by, Kani gave him a look that assured him he no longer had any reason to fear his intentions regarding the visitors from Mauro.

Almost dizzy with gladness, Don breathed a deep sigh of relief. It was beginning to feel like Christmas Day after all!

A SAWI CHRISTMAS SERVICE

After Amio had settled Hurip at the clinic, Don and Carol walked together along a path toward the thatch-roofed church where the feast was now ready. Sawi Christians mingled with groups of still-reluctant guests who preferred to stay close to their spear-paddles and canoes.

One by one, bands of solemn strangers yielded to the kindly persuasion of the believers and began to file toward the church. Wide-eyed and wondering, they stepped under festive palm branches and entered the cool, spacious interior. Their skin tingled with the new feeling of unre-served welcome that seemed to charge the very air.

Don, Carol, Stephen, and Shannon watched together as Christian Sawi from many different vil-lages rose and crossed the now crowded meeting house to lay gifts of sago, beetle grubs, and wild pork at the feet of former enemies. While the giving went on and on, the full-throated singing of Sawi Christmas carols swelled around them, thanking God for giving His Son, the great-est gift of all.

Next Isai, a Sawi preacher, rose to his feet and read the verse of Scripture that Don had shared when he introduced Jesus as God’s Peace Child: “For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given...” Don looked around at the radiant faces of believers filled with adoration of the Peace Child, Immanuel, God with us. God’s good news of great joy for all people had finally reached the Sawi.

GO DEEPER

- Read *Treachery on the Twisted River* or *Peace Child*, both available from our [Pioneers book store](#) and other sources.
- Read about Don's life and impact in [Remembering Don Richardson](#).
- Visit the website [Peace Child Legacy](#), created by the Richardson family.