

APRIL 09 - SUMMARY – JUNGLE CHILD

BY SABINE KUEGLER

Keith has done it again, selected another wonderful book. Jungle Child took us to another new country we had not explored, West Papua New Guinea. While eating grubs didn't sound too appealing, the childhood experienced by Sabine did sound rather ideal to some of us.

We also welcomed five new people; Quincy, Jann, Richard, Kathleen, Judith, and they added a lot to the discussion. We hope to see you at future meetings.

Similar to other books read recently by the TLBC, Sabine left us with more questions than she answered. Where her parents religious missionaries? Are they still alive and still living in on the island? How did both her siblings end up living in the U.S? Phylliss and Paula researched Sabine and found that she has written a second book, currently only available in German. It is supposed to cover her return visit to West Papua as an adult in 1995. As none of our German is up to snuff, we can only hope that it will eventually be translated into English.

One of the first questions that the group discussed was where Sabine's parents selfish to bring their children into such a primitive, superstitious society. Several of the group felt the parents shouldn't have taken them into such a remote and dangerous situation. In addition to the dangers of the jungle with deadly animals and malaria, there was the cannibalistic nature of the tribes. The main concern was that the three children being raised in non-western cultures over such an extended period of time, that they did not have adequate preparation or parental or familial support when they did return to a Western society.

Others of the group felt that the foreign experiences they had in both Nepal and West Papua expanded the kids and offered them things that a western upbringing could never give them. Examples would be their acceptance to other cultures, ability to adapt to change, no fear of bugs, a closer relationship and a true understanding of the cycles of nature and their integration into the village life of the Fayu.

Sabine and her sibling's upbringing seemed to have an abundance of freedom and a release of the western standards of schedules and time. While their Mom home schooled them, local teachers from the U.S. supplied the curriculum. Sabine did not mention any difficulty fitting into the high school curriculum in Switzerland. What she suffered from mostly was adapting to a strict schedule and societal and cultural situations in the west.

Paula had two questions to pose to the group.

1. Was it wise to bring European children into such an isolated environment without preparing them for a future in the west?

Shannon, one of our new members and a returning peace corps volunteer, said that families that do extensive traveling when the children are young succeed if they

integrate into the local culture, but also maintain strong ties to their country of origin. Regular home visits and daily candid discussions about how the home culture differs from the one they are living, helps the kids compare and contrast what they are experiencing, while staying tied to their country of origin. Most of our group felt that this is where the parenting of these kids could have used some improvement.

2. Does a self-sufficient tribe really need anything from the western culture?

Two discussions evolved; one about how primitive cultures invariability change and loose their uniqueness if there is any, and even more quickly if they have prolonged exposure to western ideas. Others felt that the tribe did change for the better. The tribe appeared to be approaching potential extinction due to their war like nature, vendettas and no understanding about illness and disease. The family, by their examples rather than trying to change the Fayu, allowed the Fayu to see a different way to handle problems and settle misunderstandings. In addition, through the work of the father, he recorded a unique language that was in danger of disappearing.

The three children also helped teach the Fayu children how to play and laugh. While this was strange to some of our group, it was explained that children who are raised under the constant threat of war, are not accustomed or encouraged to play.

Perhaps one of the ways to find out if you are really integrated into a society is to accept for yourself what is customary for them. Someone gave an excellent example regarding how many Chinese feel that giggling shows weakness and is a sign of embarrassment. The Chinese show their amusement by crinkling their eyes instead of a western-style giggle.

The book Guns, Germs and Steel by Jared Diamond was brought up by several members. The book is now a PBS series and describes how societies evolve and why some cultures thrive and other collapse. This book might be an interesting selection for the club to consider in the future, either as a main book or side reading.

We got the feeling that Sabine is still straddling the pull of two cultures. There is the draw of the freedom in the primitive culture vs. the structure of the west. Sabine acknowledged a change within herself even after less than a year in Switzerland, and yet longed from the simplicity of life with the Fayu. Perhaps if she had gone to a less structured society instead of Europe, she would have had an easier acclimatization period and would have found better balance. From her writing, she appears to still be casting about trying to find her feet.

The group enjoyed the book and are hungry for more details of her family's feelings about their time in Papua and their current lives. Hopefully, her second book will soon be translated into English.

Thank you, Keith for suggesting this book and for leading the discussion.

FUTURE MEETINGS

	BOOK	BY	LEAD BY
May 11	My Path Leads to Tibet	Tenberken	Willie
Jun 8	Arabian Sands	Thesinger	David
Jul 13	TBA		
Aug 10	TBA		
Sept 14	TBA		
Oct 12	TBA		
Nov 9	TBA		
Dec 14	TBA		

FOR THOSE NEW MEMBERS WHO WOULD LIKE TO LEAD A BOOK, Please bring a book suggestion, author, synopsis and do some research to make sure the book is still in print and available in paperback (\$15 or less if possible) and also available in the local library systems. The list of proposed books will be emailed to the group after the May meeting and in June we will vote on books to be read from July through December.

UPCOMING TRAVEL RELATED EVENTS

Tuesday, May 5th – 2:00 pm – Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*, will appear at the Paramount. Tickets are \$30-\$60 and can be purchased through Tickethorse.com.

Monday, May 18th – 7:30-8:45 pm - There will be a book-signing event at the Tattered Cover – Colfax location. Jane Stanfield will be reading from and discussing her book, *Mapping Your Volunteer Vacation*.

It appears that serendipitously the Tattered Cover Give Back program will be offering a 20% discount on travel books for May. As soon as I have confirmation, I will let the group know.

The program is free and for every dollar you spend, a portion is donated to a local non-profit. You get to choose where to direct the donation.

Thursday, April 23 – 6:00–7:30 pm The Budget Treasurers Travel Club at the Ross UHills Library www.budgettreasurerstravelclub.com

Every Tuesday - Changes in Latitude - in Boulder offer lectures on various travel topics. www.cil.com

If you come across any travel related events that will happen between now and the next meeting, please let me know and I will forward them to the group.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT AND INTEREST.

I look forward to seeing each of you at our next meeting. Until then, Travel in Safety!

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