

Merry Christmas Margie!

Thanks so much for this email from Dr. Larry Lake about Miss Heikkinen. I didn't know she was still alive. What an amazing woman! She along with Miss Bethky (sp?) were my first grade teachers at Dalat School in 1941! They along with others from the staff escorted my brothers Doug (12), Les (10), me (6) and other school mates to Saigon so that we could join up with our parents who were seeking away to leave the country completely overtaken by the Japanese on August 2. My parents made the 200 mile trip by rickety truck from Banmethuot in the highlands and on August 7 we along with others, including Miss Heikkinen, were fortunate enough to leave Indo China on the "Marechal Joffre", one of France's last ships to be able to do so. Four days later we arrived in Manila and a month later on September 7 our family along with Miss Heikkinen and others boarded the "President Harrison" liner for Hong Kong, Shanghai, Pearl Harbor and San Francisco. Somewhere in our assortment of photos there is a picture of Miss Heikkinen and our family on board the "President Harrison". I will have to make a concerted effort to find it.

God bless you and your family Margie, and may God have mercy on these now Divided States of America,

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----- Original Message -----
From: "Margie Ulsh" <mutu@pyramids.net>
To: <Undisclosed-Recipient:;>
Sent: Monday, December 19, 2005 9:03 PM
Subject: Fw: A Visit with Miss Heikkinen

> ----- Original Message -----
> From: "Larry Lake" <lake@messiah.edu>
> Sent: Monday, December 19, 2005 9:53 PM
> Subject: A Visit with Miss Heikkinen
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> A Visit with Miss Heikkinen
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> On December 16, my sister Karen and I visited Armia Heikkinen at the
> Lyngblomsten Care Center, a nursing home in St. Paul, Minnesota.
> She is now 105 years old, and was recently given birthday greetings
> in a small article in Alliance Life. She is unable to speak but

> sits peacefully in her wheelchair, and she did respond well to hugs
> and handclasps, and to our talking to her about our good memories
> of Sentani school, and of her good teaching. We thanked her for her
> years of ministry to children and to their missionary parents, both
> in New Guinea and in Viet Nam. Karen and I, both with years of
> education since then, recall her as one of the best teachers either
> of us has ever had. (Karen, 51, is on the pastoral staff of Autumn
> Ridge Church in Rochester, Minnesota, and is completing a degree in
> counseling; I'm 54 and have a Ph.D. from University of
> Pennsylvania, and have been teaching at Messiah College in
> Pennsylvania since 1984. Our combined ages this year, in fact, add
> up to Miss Heikkinen's age!)

>
> The nursing staff at Lyngblomsten are impressive in their love and
> care for the residents. They told us that until just a month or two
> ago, Miss Heikkinen, whom they call Anna (officially her first name,
> though she
> usually went by Armia, her middle name), was still quite alert. In
> fact, say the nurses, when she did speak she often wasn't speaking
> English, but one of the six other languages they understand that she
> has used in her life! Two older Vietnamese women are also residents
> at the home, and in the past years, Miss Heikkinen has often sat
> with them at lunchtime, chatting in Vietnamese! Miss Heikkinen came
> to New Guinea at age 58 after a long teaching career in Viet Nam,
> where she had founded Dalat School in the 1920's.

>
> I was one of four students the opening day of the Sentani School, in
> August 1958. (The others were John Cutts, Barton Boggs, and
> Beverly Boggs. Kenny Troutman and the Larsen girls, Marlene and
> Romaine, arrived a few weeks later that first semester.) I recall
> the one classroom in which Miss Heikkinen taught as many as six
> grades, her reading "The Wind in the Willows" and "Paddle to the
> Sea" to all of us, and a few math lessons interrupted by the din of
> a rainstorm on the aluminum roof. That school building, originally
> the home of pilot Ed Ulrich, was later replaced by more modern
> classroom buildings; and the school was decommissioned in 1998,
> merging with Hillcrest International School on a ridge to the west.
> In an article I
> wrote about Sentani School in 1978, Miss Heikkinen recalled the
> early days there:

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> "The home and the other buildings were fragile affairs. On the
> inside the walls were Masonite, brown in color. But the schoolroom
> soon got a lovely coat of bright paint. The blackboards were
> Masonite, painted with blackboard paint, which worked very well. The
> first desks were made by a carpenter in Hollandia, and patterned
> after the Dutch desks, with a board for a footrest, [and with a hole
> for an inkwell!]. All the school supplies and books both for study
> and the library came from the States. This required sending in an

> order for supplies at least three months before they were needed.
> When the crates of books and supplies arrived, the children helped
> carry things in."
>
> In fact, I still remember well when Mr. Mike (Einar Mickelson) drove
> the mission's red pickup truck to the school from the dock in
> Hollandia, on a bright afternoon when we should have had classes.
> Instead, we were
> conscripted to carry boxes and to help unpack. We were duly
> impressed by a brass handbell, which Miss Heikkinen would use for
> years to announce the beginning of the school day and call us from
> recess and the lunch hour which included nap time. I recall helping
> unpack the set of Encyclopedia Britannica, and previewing its
> airplane article before the books had even been shelved! Soon,
> every wall in the classroom was lined with bookshelves, and
> well-stocked ones, at that!
>
> Miss Heikkinen inspired many of us with her love of music. She
> played a violin, and conducted music appreciation classes in her
> living room where she played classical music on her record player.
> (Fittingly, when the school expanded a few years after her departure
> from New Guinea around 1962, her former house became the music
> classroom, with a bandroom and practice rooms.) Her fascination
> with nature also influenced many of us deeply. She built a
> microscope from a kit, and in one written account of Sentani, she
> compared living among birdsong, tropical vegetation and near a
> rainforest-covered mountain with what it must be like to live in
> Narnia. She encouraged experimentation: Karen and I both remember
> being with all the
> other students in a large circle in her house, with hands linked,
> while one of us cranked the old telephone on the wall, sending a
> current surging through the circle. This was surely a dramatic way
> to teach us about
> electrical circuits! She often read articles to us from Time
> magazine; helping us keep abreast of the space race, with American
> politics during the Eisenhower era, and then the presidential
> campaigns of Kennedy and Nixon. I recall her showing us her absentee
> ballot before she marked it and sent it to the United States for
> the 1960 election. (Many years later in a graduate course, I learned
> the term for her approach to teaching:
> "experiential education." That explains the dozens of
> different-shaped leaves and many kinds of seeds she brought to class
> for botany units --in 3rd grade! -- and the jars of cloves,
> cinnamon, and nutmeg to touch and to smell and to taste that she
> brought from her kitchen for a 5th grade unit on world exploration
> and the Spice Islands!)
>
> Although Karen and I visited Miss Heikkinen at lunchtime (her nurse
> always gives her dessert first, and is impressed at the healthy

> appetite she has), we also saw her little room, decorated with a few
> Vietnamese wall hangings, some fine quilts, and pictures of her
> brother and sister, both of whom died many years ago. (Karen
> remembers visiting Miss Heikkinen in 1976 when she was sharing an
> apartment with her sister in St Paul; and Miss Heikkinen
> subsequently attended Karen's wedding to Rick Foster, in Rochester
> Minnesota.)

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> Karen and I considered it a great privilege, after these many years,
> to see Miss Heikkinen again, and to thank her, for all of us, for
> her many years of faithful ministry to missionary children.

>
> Our parents, Hi and Mary Lake, live a few miles from Karen, in
> Rochester, Minnesota, and our two brothers and their families live
> nearby as well. Our brother David was born in Karubaga, and now
> works in MRI research at the Mayo Clinic. Kevin has taught social
> studies for 13 years, including two at Sentani. Dad retired 12 years
> ago from administration at the Mayo Clinic, and recently celebrated
> his 80th birthday. They have 4 children, 7 grandchildren, and a
> great-grandson.

>
> Larry Lake.

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> P.S. I am planning to expand this account as a longer publishable
> article about Miss Heikkinen's life and ministry, and her former
> students' (and friends') memories of her. If you have such a tale
> about her, even a brief one, please feel free to send it to me at
> Lake@messiah.edu, by February 15. Any photos you have of her or of
> the Sentani School from 1958 to 1963 would be welcome as well. Thank
> you! If you need a mailing address for the photos (they will be
> returned) it is below:

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