



# River Hijacking and Theft

## an unfortunate special update

\*\*\*\*\*The following story is very graphic and violent in nature. I am trying to be as truthful and share just the facts of what happened in chronological order. \*\*\*\*\*

I got a call on Thursday afternoon from a PMV driver that I use quite frequently. He informed me that Amina (our nurse) had just called him from a village very close to Angoram and that our canoe had been held up and taken by four men armed with guns. He didn't have enough pre-paid credit on his phone to call her. So he wanted me to call her and find out what was going on. I called her and she was very upset. She told me that as they were traveling on the river down to Angoram, there was a section that was very narrow and they saw a canoe that was familiar. Because it was raining, a lot of the passengers were huddled under the tarpaulin. Our driver guided our canoe over to the next one to see if they were having outboard engine problems. The canoe was familiar, but the people in it were not.

There were four masked and armed men in the other canoe. Because that section of the river is particularly narrow and a 50-foot canoe is hard to maneuver once slowed and in a confined area, there was no option to get away. The four men jumped into our canoe with guns and machetes and started beating the passengers and driver with the machetes and butts of the guns. They held the driver at gun point so that he could not drive the canoe away.

Every passenger got either beaten over the head with the barrel of a gun or smashed in the head with the butt of a gun. All were smacked around with the flat side of a machete. They were all told to kneel in the canoe. The four assailants covered them with the tarp, and they would beat them if they moved or tried to raise their heads to see. They took over the outboard motor and started their escape. As they were moving away from the scene of the crime, another boat coming down river blocked their escape. They held that boat at gunpoint and started to ransack that boat as well. Seeing her chance, Amina and three of the children jumped out of the canoe into the river and started to swim away. Because there were only four men trying to hold them and rob the other boat, she was able to get away unharmed.

Amina was able to get to a village that was really close and call some friends and family in Angoram, which was about a 45-minute boat ride away. Once I had all of this information, I asked Amina if they had let the passengers out of the canoe. She said no that they had taken everyone with them, except for her and the three kids that

jumped out with her.

I called the PMV driver back and told him what I could. He organized a boat, motor, and fuel and then left Angoram to go up river to try to find our people and canoe. Meanwhile, I went to the police station here in Wewak (where I was) and filed a report. Since Wewak is a four-hour drive from Angoram and it was 3:00 in the afternoon, nothing beyond a report could be done by the police in Wewak, and there were no police at the station in Angoram. So any recovery effort that afternoon was going to have to be done by our friends and family members of the hostages in Angoram.

They were taken hostage around 2:30 P.M. After the boat had been commandeered as well, the four men continued driving to the Keram River, where they seized all the valuables from the canoe and filled the boat. All of the fuel and tanks were taken, as well as the fuel line, tool box and fuel filter, plus all the possessions and bags of the driver and passengers of our canoe. During this whole ordeal, any time the baby of our elementary teacher would cry, they would beat the father or mother of the child to keep the baby quiet. Any noise or movement under the tarp resulted in swift, brutal retaliation.



When they heard the search party coming in a boat, the four armed assailants took the propeller off of our motor and set the canoe adrift, taking with them all the property of any value in the boat they had stolen. This occurred at 7:30 P.M. So finally the five-hour ordeal of being beaten and held hostage was over for our people in the canoe.

### **The Aftermath**

I was notified in Wewak. We were very thankful that there was no loss of life. The next morning I went back to the police station and a task force squad was assigned to follow up my report. I paid for the fuel for the police car (so that there would be enough to go and come back), and we left for Angoram about 1:30 P.M.

On arriving in Angoram, I went to see all those that had been taken while the police performed a raid into the assailants' village upriver. My friends who were held hostage are all okay physically. Yes, they all have cuts, bruises, and bumps. Those will heal and maybe have scars. However, they are all in shock and recovering emotionally from all they have been through in the past twenty-four hours. Please

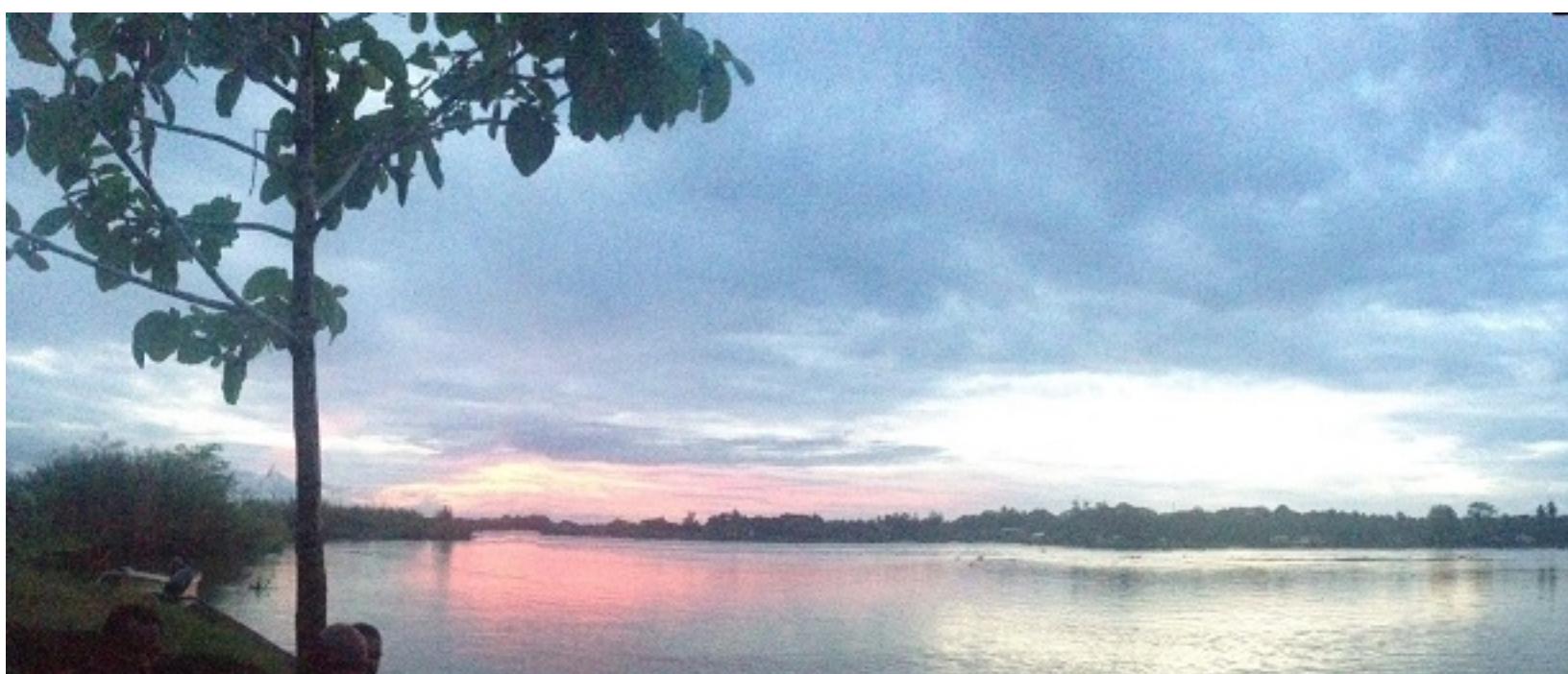
continue to pray for their healing, not only physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

The people in Angoram that had helped us the night before could identify who the four men were. The police went upriver and when the villagers heard them coming, they cleared out! No one was left in the village except for a couple of old men and women. There was no one to question, and the police informed the few that were still in the village that the four men needed to be handed over to the police in Angoram and all of the stolen property needed to be returned. Then the police returned to Angoram, and I accompanied them back to Wewak.

As of this moment the propeller has been returned by some of those in the village of the four assailants. They are working with the police and our people to return the items that were stolen. The boat and part of the motor that was stolen has been returned. They split the motor that was taken off the boat in half taking the bottom gear box. The word is now to wait until Sunday afternoon to see if all the items can be returned.

We have no idea what the motive was at this point. The fact that our canoe and motor were chosen for this abduction and theft appears to be random. All four men who took part in this gruesome event appeared to be on some substance drugs and/or alcohol that clouded their thinking.

So pray for these four young men. Pray for a change of heart in their lives. Also pray for the people that were injured, for a full recovery physically and emotionally. Pray for the family members of those that were beaten. In PNG culture, usually an event like this results in some form of retaliation. Pray for cool heads and forgiving hearts.



## Where Do We Go From Here

We are still in Wewak. We should have been back in Samban by now, but we are stuck in Wewak because our motor and canoe are out of commission until I can find all the parts necessary to get the motor back up and running. We are wondering now what this means for us in the long run. What should we do about long-term plans for this kind of an event? Safety in travel has been an issue before, but not for something like this. What does the future hold for our travel and those who travel with us? How will our budget be affected by the loss of all the items taken, the ongoing investigation, and damage to the motor? Will it be safe for our family to travel on the river

anymore? What steps can we take for our safety that reflect His teachings, but still maintain a Christ-like witness for those around us?

A lot of these questions we are going to have to work through over the next few months. The answers we arrive at will affect how we do ministry. It will affect how we live day to day. So please keep our family in your prayers for wisdom, safety, and peace.



An old picture of the canoe.

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**Our mailing address is:**

Outreach International of Papua New Guinea  
2165 Liberty Church Rd.  
Martinsville, IN 46151

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