**REFERENCES**


---

‘Today I am so happy to see friends I once worked with many years ago’

**Inamba Kivita**

Wanitabi Village, c/o Papua New Guinea Institute of Medical Research, PO Box 60, Goroka, EHP 441, Papua New Guinea

I was approximately 16 years old when I first met Dr Carleton Gajdusek in Wanitabi village, situated south of Okapa in the Eastern Highlands Province. I worked with Shirley Lindenbaum when she came to live in our village, and I helped Michael Alpers with his research. I was asked to work as a translator, also to assist with the fieldwork and carry personal things like camera, books and film. The older men carried the heavy boxes from one village to another on kuru surveillance patrols.

There were other medical scientific officers who came later with whom I worked as well, such as Dr Hornabrook and John Mathews. I was trained by them to perform autopsies on kuru dead bodies. Though my position with the project was as a translator, sometimes it was my duty to take human samples collected from the field to Goroka by plane from Tarabo airstrip and return back to the field by the same route.

One of the colleagues who helped me was Tosetnam from Miarasa village; we both shared the workload and helped in the fieldwork. Some of our comrades are not here owing to medical reasons and some, like Tosetnam, have already died. Today I am so happy to see friends I once worked with many years ago, in the 1960s and 1970s.

---

**Kuru fieldwork in 1981 … and beyond**

**Robert Klitzman**

*Columbia University, 722 West 168th Street, New York, NY 10032, USA*

In 1981, I was fortunate to be able to conduct epidemiological fieldwork on kuru and the experience forever changed me. At the time, the prevalence and incidence had both declined markedly. Yet, clusters of cases still occurred in various villages and questions arose of whether these were the results of the last feast held in each of these areas. I trekked throughout the kuru region, examining current cases and collecting genealogies on 65 recent patients. As described more fully in a paper in *Neuroepidemiology* (Klitzman et al. 1984) and in a book about my fieldwork in Papua New Guinea, *The trembling mountain: a personal account of kuru, cannibals, and mad cow disease* (Klitzman 1998), I identified and described three clusters of patients, with patients in each developing kuru virtually simultaneously after having been infected at the same one or two feasts that occurred close together in time. The three pairs had incubation periods of 21, 24 and 28 years, and members of each pair did not vary by more than a year. This research suggested that the disease could therefore follow a uniform course of incubation in two or more people, even when the incubation period is over two decades. It was thus possible to determine when exposure occurred, and hence calculate precisely natural incubation periods for prions in humans—which had not been done before.

Yet I found, too, that some participants at each of these feasts had much shorter incubation periods. Hence, age and viral strains did not determine incubation period. Perhaps the initial dose of the agent or the genetics of the infected individual did.