

# The Owen Outreach

Chronicling the Ministry of Todd and Angela Owen

*Serving with Pioneer Bible Translators' Papua New Guinea Branch*

*Translating the New Testament with the Somau Garia People*

P.O. Box 997 • Madang 511 • PAPUA NEW GUINEA • toddowen@pioneerbible.org.pg

## Six Years And Going

The decision was made somewhere deep in the mists of time, when the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit agreed that a small people group in north-east New Guinea would need to hear God's story in the language of their fathers. They began setting forth the gears of history, shaping it so that a boy from a country and people that would not exist for thousands of years would meet a girl, from that same country, and arrange it so that they would meet at just the right time and circumstance so that they would marry. Not only would they marry, but they would be of one heart and mind about their service to God—to serve him cross-culturally, to go to the jungles of New Guinea in behalf of the gospel.

1997 was the year and February the month when those young people arrived in Papua New Guinea in obedience to God's call. They spent four months in orientation, easing into the culture bit by bit, learning the trade language, learning new ways of thinking and doing.

June of that year they moved from a coastal area inland into the low mountains bordering on the Ramu River Valley and began learning a another new language and culture—Somau Garia. July of that year they began to feel the pains of spiritual opposition as unknown illness plagued them and then later, as the literacy program was torn apart by social turmoil, as one of the workers raped another's wife and the offended husband attempted to murder the offender. Ultimately the offender was exiled.

A few years later and a trip to Mayo Clinic helped resolve the health issues and, while the literacy workers are still dealing with the ramifications of the previous wrong, other workers—translation workers—began a new work in September, 2002. A two-week long translation course inaugurated translation of the Gospel of Mark (*see 'Process and Progress'*) and steady progress is being made through the long and detailed process of insuring that the final product will be clear, accurate, and natural.

February 2003 marked six years that the young couple and their four children have lived and worked in Papua New Guinea. Six years have born much fruit in their lives as well as the lives of many Somau Garia. Six years have brought new hope to many Christians as they have seen the hard work and perseverance of their uncles and fathers and husbands as they work at translating Mark and anticipate hearing God's Word in their language in a few years. Six years have also brought tragedy, opposition, and strain to those men working on Mark—but that also is according to Jesus' promise (in Mark 10:30) that those who would undertake his work would have not only their share of rewards but their share of persecutions.

*As you pray, thank God that, by his grace alone, he has enabled the Owen family to live and work with Somau Garia co-translators six-plus years. Ask him for enough more years to finish the task he has given us, even as the stability of Papua New Guinea disintegrates. Ask God to continue to open hearts and minds to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to penetrate the thick veil of deception which ensnares so many. Ask also for grace and mercy for the Owen family as they live and work in a culture not their own.*

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Spring 2003

## V.I.P. s Visit Uria

For months we had been preparing for the arrival of Angela's parents, Ken and Sharon Reed. Not only was our own sense of anticipation heightened as the time drew near, but also that of the Somau Garia people, specifically those Garia people living in Uria Village, the village in which we live. "How will we welcome them? We want them to know that we take care of you all. Should we meet them in town or wait for them in the village? Should we do a drama for them? Should we give them gifts?" The people were nervous as cats in a thunderstorm, wanting to make a good impression on Angela's parents—to let them know that they are taking care of their daughter. This was not a visit by interns, or an administrator, this was a **family** visit, and around here, family is infinitely more important than just about anything else.

Surprisingly, the overwhelming emotion running through the hearts was that of sorrow for Angela's parents—sorrow that these fine people had to live without their daughter, their grandchildren, their son-in-law. They were sorry that Angela's folks had to fly 10,000 miles to visit. They were sorry that the roads in Papua New Guinea are terrible and were somewhat ashamed that Angela's parents would see the decrepit state of the infrastructure and be burdened by the knowledge that this is "all" that she has here. They were sorry that Angela's folk would miss the biggest Garia feast of the year by only a few weeks.

If they could only have understood the tears in the eyes of our V.I.P.'s. Angela's folks were illuminated with new understanding and empathy for life in Uria and also a good deal of satisfaction, I suspect. We tried to explain to our Garia friends that very often people from our culture cry tears of joy—it is not always tears of sadness or bitterness. My suspicion is that these words were not understood at a heart level. We tried to explain that Angela's folks have worked all their lives for God's desires and are happy to give their daughter into God's hands so that the Garia people might receive God's blessing through His Word. And yet the value the Garia people place on the interdependence of the extended family makes it difficult for them comprehend the idea of giving of your flesh and blood *for the sake of the gospel*.

Nonetheless, Angela's folks were two weeks in Uria and what a blessing they were to us (and to our co-workers). Though we have been living in our house a year and a half (or so), many of the finish projects have been left undone up to now. Ken worked diligently the entire time he was with us—hanging doors, making an exterior door for our utility room, painting, welding, anything and everything he could do to help finish out some of the projects on my very long to-do list—he also did dishes everyday giving the kids a bit of a holiday from their chores. Sharon helped Angela with her to-do list: curtains to be sewed, tea parties with her granddaughters, books to be read, meals to be cooked, etc.

Ken and Sharon deeply ministered to us in a thousand little (and big) ways. We have been on the field this term almost three years (with another 14 months before furlough) and their visit was definitely a well-timed, well-served blessing.

*As you pray, thank God that he so thoroughly ministered to us through providing for the visit of Angela's parents. Thank God that he brought them safely to New Guinea and returned them safely home—even as the United States was sitting on the brink of the outbreak of war while they were traveling. Ask God to bless them abundantly for their obedient service to Him.*



*Ken and Sharon Reed, Angela's parents, were joyously welcomed into Uria village in a traditional way. The men and women pictured with the Reeds gave a live chicken for them to eat while the Reeds gave similar gifts of meat to the dancers.*



*Ken and Sharon attend Sunday morning worship services in Uria Village. Abigail rests in her grandmother's lap as Ken listens to the song leader.*

# Process and Progress

One of the many jobs that I have as a cross-cultural missionary is that of education. I educate the co-translators with whom I work. I educate village folks through preaching and teaching. I educate visitors and interns regarding life and thought in Papua New Guinea. I also find it prudent to educate you, our readers, friends, supporters, prayer partners in the process of *how* we do our work, so that you can both understand and pray more clearly as we progress through the various stages. In the following paragraphs I would like to briefly outline the process of Bible translation and then, finally, report to you where we stand in progress.

## Rough Draft

The initial step in Bible translation is to make a rough translation (rough draft) of the text in Somau Garia. We have tried two approaches, both of which work pretty well: ① Use the Greek text and study helps together with a trade language Bible to arrive at a fairly accurate draft and ② Use the trade language Bible to make a rough draft which requires more “tweaking” later. Approach number one we found to be quite time consuming. Approach number two allows more independent work but gives more work to Todd later.

Both approaches give us a rough translation to use as a basis for refinement.

## Initial Revision and Back Translation

Those initial rough translations are often done by individuals or small groups at their village areas.

When those are completed, the Garia translators gather together and “screen” the rough drafts for naturalness and clarity. At that point, if they have any questions about the meaning of the text, we sort out difficulties. While the main group is doing revision of the rough draft, I, together with Siramia Kauwaki and Kenny Maiya (pictured) translate the previously “screened” Garia chapters into the trade language (Melanesian Pidgin or *Tok Pisin*) and then I translate it further into English.

The back translation can then be compared with the original text (like the Greek New Testament or a relatively



Siramia Kauwaki and Kenny Maiya are worth double honor. These men work with Todd on back translating Garia scripture passages into *Tok Pisin* and also work helping him puzzle out the more intricate grammatical relations of the Somau Garia language.

literal translation like the New American Standard Bible) for purposes of determining its accuracy.

## Village Check

Following initial revisions, back translation, and exegetical checks, it is then taken to people who have not participated in the translation process. The text is read aloud by a native speaker, then the tester asks comprehension questions regarding the text: “Who went ashore? How many people ate the bread and fish? To whom did he say . . .?” The village check helps us determine if the meaning of the text is clear to people

hearing it for the first time, rather than by translators who have studied and had much interaction with the text. We then revise rough spots.

## Peer and Consultant Checks

After this revision, (and the revised back translation), the material goes to another exegete, usually another PBT member. This is called the peer check, as one of our peers checks meaning. After further revisions, the text then goes to trained consultant, who usually conducts comprehension checks (similar to village checks). At this point, when the revisions are completed that the consultant has recommended, the text is ready for printing.

To date, we have completed nearly all of the Gospel of Mark in **rough draft** form and initial revision. We have back translated chapters five and six and part of chapter four. The first week of April we will village check chapters five and six and during the remainder of April back translate and village check chapters one through six. Our goal is to have the first six chapters through **peer check** by **July**.

*Please be praying that we will be able to work efficiently (even in an event-oriented culture) and that we can achieve accuracy, clarity, and naturalness. Please pray that God's Word, in the Somau Garia language will prove to be a battering ram to break down walls of deception and ignorance that keep so many Garia from walking with God.*



# As You Pray . . .

I suppose that you noticed the newspaper excerpt that “accidentally” got included with this call to prayer. The folks who promote tourism in Papua New Guinea aren’t incredibly pleased with this sort of journalism, but the report has a few finer points that are hard to ignore, especially as one tries to travel on a national highway that is essentially a collection of potholes, sinkholes, landslides, and other maladies meant to inflict the maximum fees on one’s repair bills. I suppose one could be thankful that they have the opportunity to support the local repair shops and put a little extra money in the pockets of the business owners—that’s it—it’s good for the country’s gross national product! This sort of journalism is a little hard to ignore when one reads reports of politicians with numbered Swiss bank accounts with millions on account—and then one goes to the rural communities where there is no school this year because the local level government squandered the education money, rather than paying teachers. It’s a little hard to ignore when one sees the front gates of the Province’s main hospital closed and locked to out-patients because there are no medicine, and few personnel.

The people of Papua New Guinea need your prayers who work here in behalf of the Kingdom. The malady both in the newspaper excerpt and above are manifestations of spiritual realities. The Father number of Kingdom workers in Papua New Guinea veil of deceit is torn away from the eyes of the enemy of our souls retaliates—where—through corrupt leadership, immorality. The only weapon our God has and it is one that he is very adept at using (just consider Holy Scriptures). Our major weapon is to translate the Scriptures into the

“Papua New Guinea is perched on the brink of economic paralysis, government collapse and social despair” a report prepared for The Centre for Independent Studies for Indonesia . . . The report points out . . . that unless the current trend is arrested, PNG will degenerate into a ‘failed state’ and Australia may need to deploy its defense forces to evacuate its 7,000 plus citizens in PNG and those of other nationalities . . . This is highly possible . . . because of the following factors: ① The economy has stagnated and the outlook for growth is bleak. ② PNG’s social indicators are too low and disproportionate to its natural resources. ③ Population growth is far outstripping growth of the economy. ④ Structural imbalances have not been corrected since Independence. ⑤ Declining living standards accompanied by severe and prolonged degradation of public institutions. ⑥ Systemic corruption and nepotism couple with an inability to prosecute those responsible. . . it could attract PNG’s downward spiral continue . . . it could attract people smugglers, drug and arms traffickers, and terrorists.”

**Dateline:** Papua New Guinea, 2003 . . .  
**Front Page Headline from the March 13 edition of The National:** ‘PNG on brink of collapse’

as do those funds, as do those dies listed merely physical has placed a large Guinea and as the those reared in ani- as is often the case else- widespread illness, pandemic enemy possesses is deception, at using (just consider Holy- Truth, and for that reason we trans- local languages of New Guinea.

With all this in mind, please be praying for Papua New Guinea as a nation, that those who are Christians will make a significant impact on the lives of their fellow citizens. Please be praying for our family as we try to live and work here. The infrastructure is, indeed, crumbling, and that sometimes makes our job very difficult. The nature of our work also puts us in direct conflict with the spiritual realities that are involved in maintaining the grand deception which holds so many here in bondage—that makes us targets and that means that we are often “under the gun”. Please be praying for the men who are active in the translation process—they are undergoing social persecution from many who think that Bible translation is pointless and that they should just “respect” the ancestral and bush gods, while others chide them for not demanding salaries and numerous fringe benefits (which they are to then give to the detractors). Pray that we will make good progress on the translation of Mark. Please also pray that our logistics will be do-able over the next three months as the roads continue to deteriorate during rainy season. Finally, pray for the protection of our health, spiritual lives, and children.