

Coping Devices

by Mike Sweeney



Salat

I was off in the bush with my buddy Camilus, gazing at a big Tong tree, discussing at length which direction the tree, which was begging to be converted into my new floor, would fall once I applied my chainsaw to it. It so happened that we had a perfect record for the day—every tree we attacked decided to get even by falling in the direction opposite to what we had intended, thereby trapping my chainsaw and forcing Camilus to free it with his axe. His patience with me was wearing thin, and it was becoming more difficult for him to cover it up. His main goal was to keep me from getting lost in the jungle and do everything possible to prevent me from ending up beneath one of my felled victims. He was fast getting to the point of deciding it would be easier to let nature take its course and just arrange for Linda to get a new husband.

As I knelt down to gain a clearer perspective of the landscape, I felt a sharp, burning sensation in my right elbow. “Yeow!” I cried in Mum (which in English means “Yeow!”). Jumping up, I worked myself into a series of contortions trying to view the damage to the back of my arm.

“What got me?” I bellowed, pulling my neck out of joint trying to see my elbow over my right shoulder.

“*Salat*,” Camilus smirked.

“What’s *salat*?” I roared, futilely twisting my arm around for a better view.

“That bush over there,” he sniggered.

Forcing my attention away from my inflamed appendage, I looked where he was pointing (with his chin) and saw nothing but dense green foliage. I remembered back to my days in Pacific Orientation Course, when the director said something about a plant that made poison ivy feel like skin balm.

“Which one?” I asked.

“The one that cooked your arm,” he replied. He seemed to be enjoying himself far more than the situation called for.

“They all look the same to me,” I said.

Camilus did the Mum equivalent of looking to the heavens. “Mike, *salat* is very dangerous. You can really mess yourself up with it. You need to be careful not ever to touch it.”

As the burning sensation in my arm began to spread, I pondered what possible strategies I could employ to help me avoid something that I couldn’t recognize.

“Well, Camilus, if you tell me what it looks like, I’ll do my best to steer clear of it!”

“Well, yes, Mike, it’s like this—there are several different kinds of *salat*, and they all look different.”

“Okay, so tell me about them all!” I stammered, running around in little circles.

Puckering his lips and assuming an exaggerated pose, he began teaching. “Well, some have little leaves, and some have big.”

“Right,” I said. “Big or little leaves.”

“And some are dark green and some are light.”

“Check—dark or light.”

“And some are on vines and some on bushes.”

“Got it,” I said, thinking that he had pretty well covered everything in plain view already.

“And if you look closely, most of them have this fine fur on the leaves.”

“OK, furry leaves.”

“But you usually can’t see that until it’s too late.”

“Thanks for the warning,” I said.

“But the best way for you to avoid *salat* at all times is ...”

“Yes?”

“Stay out of the jungle.”

So saying, Camilus picked up his axe and started back to the village.

And that, dear Reader, is why I now spend my days on this computer.

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Bringing the Word to Life



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Ethnologue

The Akighim by Ellen Rohrer

Nestled in an S shape, between the Ramu River territory of the Kire and that of the Aruamu in the foothills of the Adelbert Range (Bogia District) in Madang Province, lie the eight villages of approximately 900 speakers of the Akighim (pronounced *Ah-kugh'-um*) language. (See map on page 3.) The S shape follows a marshy valley of the coastal plain where sago palms grow in abundance, while yam gardens dot the northern and western faces of the small mountains beyond. These are the staple foods of the Akighim: yam, white in color and more fibrous than the American sweet potato, and sago, a starchy gelatinous food leached from the pith of the sago palm. For protein, the Akighim hunt wild pigs, birds, rodents, and marsupials in the surrounding rainforests and *kunai* grasslands.

Families build houses out of jungle materials: bamboo walls and thatched roofs made from coconut palm leaves. Houses in the low-lying areas are built on stilts, while those on the hillsides generally sit on the ground, thus removing the necessity of laying bamboo floors.

Catholic missionaries entered the area approximately a century ago, and the Catholic Church remains the predominant spiritual presence in the area. In recent decades, Four-Square churches and Christian Outreach Centers have been established in some villages. About one third of the population clings to animistic beliefs, venerating ancestors and appeasing demons. Even Christians sometimes find it difficult not to attribute all illnesses and death to fearful curses generated by vengeful enemies.

Until recently, the Akighim were subsistence farmers and raised no cash crop. Now, with literacy and translation programs in place, the need to pay teachers and translators has necessitated developing income-producing agriculture or industry. Their isolated position, however, with no roads directly into the area, makes it difficult for them to trade on a daily—or even weekly—basis in urban center markets. Madang town is a two-day journey away, with several hours of hiking preceding canoeing and riding a public motor vehicle into town.

For twenty years, the Akighim watched while David and Sharran Pryor worked among the Kire to the west and John and Marsha Relyea labored alongside the Aruamu to the east. The Akighim approached both the Pryors and Relyeas numerous times over those years for help in literacy and translation of the New Testament into their language. They earnestly prayed as, time and again, PBT personnel sadly told them there was no one to help them. Then, in 2000, translator Martha Wade, literacy specialist Diane Shreve, and national literacy trainer Thomas Dukun assisted the Akighim in developing their orthography. In 2001, Ellen Rohrer began typesetting and publishing materials for their vernacular schools. And in 2004, the Relyeas, using their Aruamu New Testament as the source document, compiled a rough draft of the Akighim New Testament with the *Adapt-It* computer program.

Within the next decade, according to the LORD’s will and timing, literate Akighim people will be able to hold in their hands and read published copies of God’s Word in their heart language.

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Editor's Notes:

Arrivals and departures. Birth and death. Our branch is still reeling from the sudden homegoing of our dear friend and work colleague John Relyea. The next issue of *The Storyboard* will contain a tribute to his life in conjunction with our coverage of the Aruamu New Testament dedication.

The Akighim language group are realizing breathtaking answers to twenty years of waiting and praying for God's perfect timing.

In "It's a Wonderful Life!" (pages 2 & 3), you'll read of the changes taking place in Bob and Jacque Harper's work and personal lives.

One thing that never seems to change, though, is Mike Sweeney's ability to bring laughter into our lives. You will enjoy reading *Coping Devices*: "Salat" on page 4.

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE! by Jacque Harper

Remember the old Jimmy Stewart movie where he feels useless, worth more dead than alive and ready to commit suicide? Then he makes the mistake of saying he wished he'd never been born. Remember what happened? He found out just how many lives his life affected and what would **not** have happened if he had not been there. I think we'd all like a little insight into that kind of information. **Just what has my life been worth?**

Romans 6:5-11 (The Message): *Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the Cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call! What we believe is this: If we get included in Christ's sin-conquering death, we also get included in his life-saving resurrection. We know that when Jesus was raised from the dead it was a signal of the end of death-as-the-end. Never again will death have the last word. When Jesus died, he took sin down with him. But alive he brings God down to us. From now on, think of it this way: Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you; God speaks your **mother tongue** (emphasis added), and you hang on every word. You are dead to sin and alive to God. That's what Jesus did.*

We know we will never know how our lives have affected others here in PNG until we see clearly the story in heaven someday. But that's what we have been doing here: touching lives, helping to bring God's Good News to many people in their **mother tongue** so they can have a wonderful life and share eternity with us in heaven with our Father.

Things didn't come about as we had planned when we arrived in PNG. We had trained in Dallas to be available for administrative work here, but by the time we completed our training the opening was filled. We came anyway, knowing God had called us here for His purpose, and we wanted to see what that would be. There was no way we could turn back. At age 58 we were already surprised at God's call on our lives to start a cross-cultural ministry. What could we be used for?

For 5 years we have been touching lives.

*Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you. God speaks your **MOTHER TONGUE**, and you hang on every word.*

Bob worked side by side with Kirby Weythman for four years, sharing his years of construction experience with him to keep PBT/PNG's physical property operating . . . repairing and maintaining offices and town houses, car repairs, construction of bush homes for our three newest translation teams. During all these days of work, Bob conversed with expatriate and national co-workers, instructing or sharing his life stories as God

led and the day needed, encouraging our translators and literacy workers and providing ways for them to bring God's Word to various people groups in their own mother tongues. This last year he has been managing the Technical Services Department alone, but with the same goal—to keep the process going: God's Word in the vernacular for these people. His greatest hurdle has been to learn the trade language well enough to share his deepest concerns and thoughts with PNG people. We pray God has used him well.



Keeping vehicles maintained in PNG is always a challenge because of the condition of the roads—even town streets. Bob (left) with Steve Overlin, PBT/USA, at the PBT workshop.

Jacque has been working on the logistical problems of meeting everyone's needs to keep their work going. Flights to and fro; loads of supplies bought and sent out to the bush. Government permits, visas, passport updates, and any other official paperwork that is needed. Making housing arrangements at our flats for permanent and transient staff. Interacting with other organizations and people in town to keep aware of changes and ways to network with others in accomplishing our task. Many hours spent visiting the sick in the local hospital and visiting the prison weekly to help those less

It's a Wonderful Life ... continued from page 2

fortunate folks to find their way to Jesus. Her challenge also: to speak Tok Pisin (Melanesian Pidgin, the trade language of Papua New Guinea) well enough that Jesus' love could come out to the PNG people. We pray God has used her well.



Jacque (left) and Becky Overlin visit an Apal couple from Martha Wade's village at the Madang haus sik (hospital) during our Annual General Meeting week.

PNG is known as "The Land of the Unexpected." Our "jobs" fit well into that title. We may have had a plan for the day, but usually—before we could get started—something new came up that required our immediate attention. Flexibility has been our byword! "For this I have Christ" is on

the front of our office computer to remind us that, indeed, for each task Christ is with us. It has been a challenging but rewarding five years here. We know we have learned a lot about ourselves during this time, as well as a lot about cross-cultural ministry. We know that we have gotten closer to God during this time of total dependence on Him. We know that He will continue to use us as we make ourselves available to Him in a new adventure of working with another Christian organization. We know that **it's a wonderful life** when you live it with God!

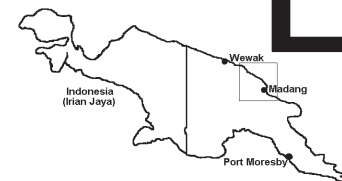
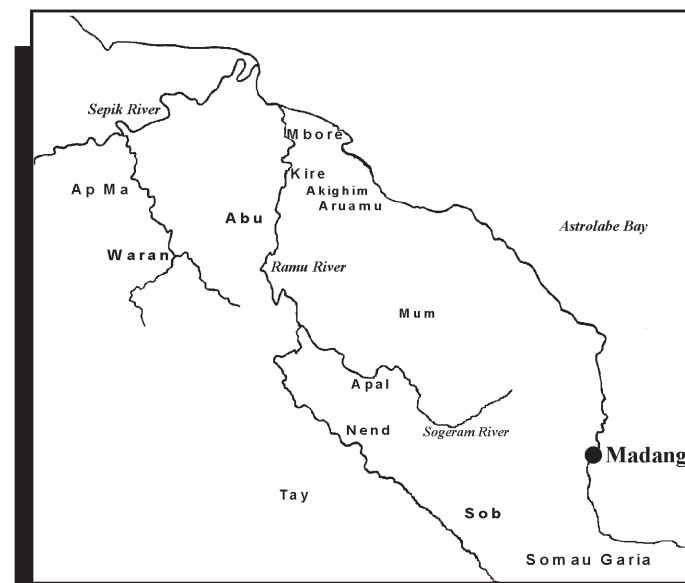
How about you? Looking for some excitement or change in your life? Feeling useless? God is at work in so many places and ways. Check out some—especially with Pioneer Bible Translators, either here in PNG or elsewhere—and perhaps He'll have a new adventure for you!

Jump in!

Jacque and Bob Harper have served the PBT/PNG Branch since January 2000 as Logistics Coordinator and Technical Services Supervisor, respectively. Finding two people to fill their shoes is definitely a God-sized task, and they will be sorely missed after they "go finish" in March! Jacque and Bob have two grown daughters and three grandchildren.

PBT in Papua New Guinea

The area map at right shows the locations of the thirteen language groups with which Pioneer Bible Translators is currently working in Madang Province and just across the Sepik River into East Sepik Province. The Kire and Aruamu languages, both of which are closely related to the Akighim, each have a complete vernacular New Testament. Akighim territory nestles between them.



by language groups