

# Stolen Nets, Stolen Allegiance

by Mark Shreve

Papua New Guinea has been called *The Land of the Unexpected*. We have found this to be an accurate description of this South Pacific island nation. We began living among the remote Abu People of the Madang and East Sepik Provinces in 2000 to learn their language and culture while building relationships through which we could translate and teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Although we had learned some about animism in our Anthropology courses, we were amazed to see how fully this religious aspect of the Abu worldview affects their lives.

One of the encounters we had in our village reveals the spiritual beliefs and condition of most Abu people. It involves stolen fish nets. One day while walking along a trail in our village we crossed paths with an Abu friend of ours named Rachel. She stopped and hesitantly told us that, as the eldest daughter, she was coming to visit us with a request on behalf of her father, Pais.

Rachel said to us, "My father had borrowed two fishing nets from his nephew and placed them across the swamp to catch fish. Someone came and stole the nets when my father was not around. This made his nephew very angry. To right the relationship my father wants to determine who stole the nets and seek compensation from them. So he went to a local seer and requested his help. The seer agreed to determine the identity of the thief through divination in dreams and visions in exchange for 20 Kina [about \$7], a bag of rice and two cans of mackerel. My father has everything that the seer wants except the canned fish. He is embarrassed to come ask you for this himself. Would you all provide the fish for my father so that he can pay the seer for his services?"



Abu Bible translators Philip and Silas editing the first draft of the Book of Ruth in their heart language.

Folks in our village often approach us with tough questions and requests like these. It is a challenge to know all of the cultural and spiritual perspectives that need to be considered for our response, so we regularly pray for wisdom and seek advice from more experienced missionaries. And we yearn for and are working hard toward the day when, like the Bereans (Acts 17:11), the Abu will be able to search their heart language Scriptures themselves and respond in faith. We pray they will respond like the Samaritans from the town of the woman who Jesus spoke with at the well, saying, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world" (John 4:42 NIV).

The Bible has been translated into Neo-Melanesian Pidgin, a trade language of PNG. Yet missionaries have confirmed time and time again that God's Word in the mother tongue speaks most clearly, accurately, naturally, and intimately to the hearts and minds of hearers. Although Protestant and Roman Catholic churches are scattered throughout the country, lack of vernacular Scriptures in many of the languages allows animistic folk religion and cultic teachings to thrive.

So we are living among the Abu, learning their language, facilitating Scripture translation, developing vernacular literacy, and teaching the Bible so that they can have, read, and understand God's Word. The Abu language was previously unwritten and therefore there are no books from which to learn their language. So, using applied linguistics, we helped them design their alphabet and are now providing initial literacy training. The Abu literacy trainees wrote the first ten Abu books in 2003. And four young Abu men recently completed the first two modules of a two-year PBT training course in preparation to be teachers for the first Abu elementary schools, schools that will teach Abu children how to read and write in their own language.

Furthermore, since there is no one other than the Lord who has the Words of eternal life, we have begun translating His Words into the Abu language. We have begun the initial training of twelve Abu men who have been designated as co-translators by their community representatives. Through Scripture translation workshops in our village we have drafted the Book of Jonah and the Book of Ruth in Abu. The Abu translators are thrilled to finally be able to see and hear portions of God's Word in the language of their heart. Lord willing, the Abu people will one day have access to the entire New Testament and several key Old Testament books in their mother tongue. In the meantime, to share God's Stories with these oral communicators, we will continue to use chronological Bible storying and audiovisual Bible stories in our evangelizing and discipling ministries.

You may be wondering how we responded to Rachel and Pais' request for the canned mackerel. We did not provide the fish for Pais to pay the seer, rather we urged them with Scripture to exchange their reliance upon other spirits for trust in God the Creator for all things.

Shortly following this encounter I was reminded of Jesus' words to Paul recorded in Acts 26:17-18 (NIV), "I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me." May these words of Christ soon become alive in the language and heart of Pais, in all of the Abu people, and in all the Bibleless peoples of the world.

Mark and Diane are in their second term of service with PBT/PNG. They are sent by Southeast Christian Church of Louisville, KY to make disciples among the Abu People through vernacular Scripture translation and literacy and Bible teaching. They live along the lower Ramu River in the village of Akurai. They have a son, Noah, who is 2 1/2 years, and a daughter, Hadassah, who is 9 months.

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The

# Storyboard

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## Their Opportunity at Learning

by Lynn Muir

The Waran people of Yar village in the East Sepik Province of Papua New Guinea have a community school in the next village up-river, so the children are now being formally educated. The Waran adults, mostly men, attended classes in *Tok Pisin*, (Neo-Melanesian Pidgin), so many know how to read and write. Later, many of the men attended vernacular literacy classes and writer's workshops and are now becoming good readers and writers of the Waran language. But the Waran women have really had no opportunity to do so. Even though they were invited to attend the same vernacular literacy classes as the men, only a few were able to attend. It was time for the Waran women to have their chance at learning to read and write their language!

As I met with the Yar Literacy Committee, they decided that I would teach a one-week Transfer-Reading Course for women. Those eligible to attend would already be literate or semi-literate in *Tok Pisin* and therefore have an understanding of what reading and writing was. The goal of the course was for these Waran women to become good readers in their language, so that they could later help in teaching other illiterate women to read and write Waran.

In preparation for the course, I developed five transfer-reading lessons and made large alphabet posters with pictures drawn by local artists, then added Waran words underneath each picture. These words included on the posters used the sound of the letter being taught at the beginning, middle, and end of each word. I also bought notebooks and pencils and supplied lapboards for the women to use in practicing writing their alphabet and to eventually write a story. Other reading materials available were the newly published *Gospel of Mark* and a storybook produced in a writer's workshop.

The Transfer-Reading Course met in the church every morning from 8 to 9, which left plenty of time for the women to go to their gardens in the late morning. To encourage regular attendance, on the first day of class I made an announcement that if the ladies came every morning and could read one portion of their language (I let them determine what and how much they wanted to read), I would give them a gift at the end of the course. The first day twenty-six ladies showed up (a few declined because they had to work in their gardens or harvest sago). But on the second day, there were a total of thirty-three women! The new students said their husbands wanted them to

attend the class. I was glad to hear that the women had the support of their husbands!

The hour-long class was divided up into three parts. The first part was spent in review of the similarities that exist between the *Tok Pisin* alphabet and the Waran alphabet, ending with a practice time of reading or writing. The Waran alphabet has twenty-two letters, with only three new sounds to learn that are not in the *Tok Pisin* alphabet. The second part was an introduction to one of the three new sounds or a new idea to help the women become better readers and writers. The last part of the course gave the women the opportunity to practice reading silently or aloud with a partner.

The week was a rewarding experience for both the Waran women and me. Many are now confident that they can read their own language after only a few days' practice. Some are

writing short stories that they are eager to have published in a future storybook, which will be used in the Yar Reading Club and future vernacular school. And still others are interested in helping others to learn to read. For me it was rewarding to have a part in teaching the Waran women to read and write their language, knowing that one day they

will be able to read the whole message concerning Jesus Christ, God's Word!

One afternoon after the course, I noticed a man and woman standing outside my door. The man was reading a paper and the woman was standing close listening to what he was reading. I stepped out onto my veranda to get a closer look at what they were doing. The woman looked up at me and said, "He's reading the story I wrote."

The pride in her eyes and the sense of accomplishment in her voice said it all.

I praise the Lord for what He will accomplish with the Waran women and that He has allowed me to be a part of it!

Lynn works with PBT as a Literacy Specialist among the Waran people. She and her husband, Leon, a pilot with Mission Aviation Fellowship, live in Goroka.

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*The woman looked up at me and said, "He's reading the story I wrote."*



## The Heart of a Giant's Final Beat ... by Jim Davis

Yesterday I attended the funeral of a good friend and a great man. William Edoni was warm, humble, and personable, a man who loved a good joke, who smiled often, and loved the Lord with all of his heart. He was devoted to the Word of God, loving it and cherishing it as a treasure. William demonstrated leadership qualities rarely found in the average man. He worked tirelessly to develop the qualities of leadership, of love, and of Christ in countless Papua New Guinean men and women.

William was also committed to the task of seeing God's Word in the hands and hearts of all the people groups in Papua New Guinea. One of his deep desires that drove him onward was to train the people of Papua New Guinea in the ways of truth and Scripture, as well as to train them to be able to do the work of Bible translation, teaching literacy, and developing their communities. He recognized that missionaries could not and would not be able to do it on their own.

His death was sudden and shocking to us all. On Sunday afternoon, February 26, he collapsed in his home from a massive stroke, never regained consciousness, and died Tuesday evening, February 28. He is survived by his wife Gail, three children, one daughter-in-law, and one granddaughter. Gail has also served in a number of ways to support and promote Bible translation in Papua New Guinea. She most recently served for a number of years as principal of the Ukarumpa International High School.

William was born on Fergusson Island in the Milne Bay Province of Papua New Guinea. His cousin said at his funeral that he and William were "law breakers" in that where their traditional customs and ways diverged from Scripture, they would break the laws of tradition, and follow the truths of the Gospel.

William was indeed a man of his people, a man of integrity, and, even more than that, a man of God. He loved his people with all of his heart. He loved them enough to confront culture when it went against Scripture. He loved them enough to preach with boldness the good news of Jesus Christ. One missionary said at his funeral, "When I came to PNG twenty-one years ago, William came and spoke to us at the Pacific Orientation Course. When he finished speaking, I thought God had made a mistake in sending me here, because if PNG had men like William, there was definitely no need for me! But I soon realized that men like William were few and far between, and I wanted to emulate his work and life in my own."

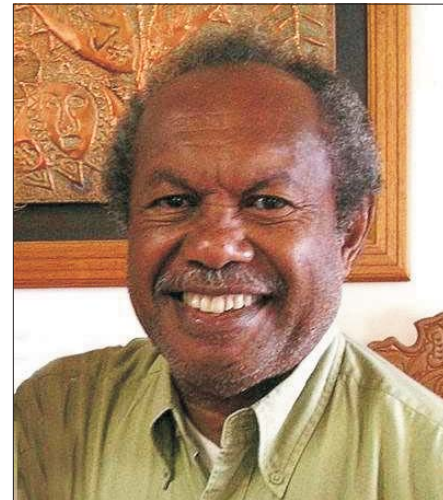


Photo by R. Karcher

William wanted with all of his heart for the people of PNG to be involved in the work of Bible translation, in the work of developing literacy programs within the country, and for them to be doing this because the need for Christ to infuse the cultures of PNG was so great. William, although standing barely 5'6" tall, was a giant of a man in PNG. He will be deeply missed by many individuals and, indeed, the country as a whole.

Jim serves as branch director for PBT/PNG. He and his wife, Cindy, have recently decided to return to the USA. They have three children, one in college, one a high school senior and one a high school freshman. Jim and Cindy were raised in Africa as missionary children, and have also served there as missionaries.

### Editor's Notes

*William Edoni served with the Summer Institute of Linguistics since 1983, as board chairman of the Bible Translation Association of Papua New Guinea, and on the board of directors of Wycliffe International. He was also instrumental in setting up the partnership that now exists between SIL, PBT, BTA, and the Bible Society of PNG. We will all feel his loss.*

*As promised in the last issue of The Storyboard, the following article shares how you can be involved in the building of a training center in Madang town so the people of PNG are able to receive training in Bible translation, teaching literacy, and Biblical studies, among other things.*

## Big Dreams, Big Plans, Exciting Future! by Jim Davis

In PBT we believe that the men and women of Papua New Guinea need to be involved in every aspect of Bible translation. That is why we want to build a National Training Center and develop a National Training Program based here in Madang. By doing this, we can train and mentor several different language groups in the art of Bible translation and literacy, as well as conduct various courses in which we train the people of PNG not only how to translate Scripture, but how to effectively use the translated Scriptures to make disciples and expand the Kingdom of God. As Todd Owen, our Assistant Director recently wrote,

*"In recent years PBT has recognized a need to begin bringing peoples from various language groups together and to train them in a larger group setting. Bringing the peoples together, rather than training them in isolated areas, provides an atmosphere of cooperation, cross-pollination, and mutual encouragement: all strong points of grass roots movements.*

*One obstacle to gathering people from various districts and provinces is having suitable facilities to house and train them. To overcome this obstacle, PBT is pursuing either purchasing or developing a training center comprised of dormitories, a large classroom, smaller classrooms/work areas, a kitchen/dining area, as well as outside space for relaxing, sports, and small garden plots for growing bananas and vegetables.*

have identified some property that would be ideal for the purposes described above, but there are two obstacles: One is that the property is currently unavailable, and the second is that, if it were to become available, we could not afford it! We are certain that it will cost at least \$200,000, but the figure will probably be much higher than that. Now, to us these obstacles may seem insurmountable, but to a God who owns everything, this is "something nothing" as they might say in Melanesian Pidgin. Pray with us about this. We definitely will need a property in order to go forward with this dream. Please pray that God will open the doors directing us to the property best suited for His purposes. Discuss it with your mission committees and VBS planners. A thousand churches or individuals raising \$200 would do it. Two hundred churches or individuals raising \$1,000 would do it. There are a number of ways it can be done. My question is this, "Do you want to be a part of it?"



Potential dormitory (1 of 4) holding 20 potential students each



Potential training center needing your help to acquire and renovate it!

*The kinds of training that benefit from having larger groups and which PBT is planning to implement include: translation courses/workshops, Biblical studies (for training translators and pastors), literacy curriculum and materials production workshops, community development workshops, and leadership training seminars."*

We cannot build or even think of attempting this without God going before us. Would you make this a matter of concerted prayer? We

We are in exciting times and cannot wait to see what God is going to do, through us, in us, and beyond us. Be a part of the future. Be a part of our dream for PNG. But more importantly, be involved in what God is doing here!

Excited? To be a part of this exciting future, send contributions to "Pioneer Bible Translators" with a note attached stating it is for the PNG Training Center, addressed to:

PBT Finance Office  
P.O. Box 380820  
Duncanville, TX 75138-0820

Another very important role you can play is by partnering through continued monthly support to enable the ongoing operations of the training center. Interested? We very much need you! Write to the above address, or email to:

[director@pioneerbible.org.pg](mailto:director@pioneerbible.org.pg)

