

Operation: Painim Kau

(Operation: Looking for a Cow)

by William Butler



What's a cow got to do with a New Testament dedication? Any large celebration in our part of Papua New Guinea involves a feast. In fact, an abundance of food is a major indicator of the significance of the event. For the Aruamu New Testament Dedication, an event that involved the entire language group with a potential of thousands in attendance, the feast had to be over-the-top . . . the reputation of Tiap as the hosting village was at stake! *Operation: Painim Kau* was initiated.

Day 1

On the Thursday before the dedication, Steven Dazim and I—accompanied by half a dozen Aruamu men, PBT's President Rondal Smith, and a long-time friend of the Relyeas, John Anderson—set off to look for a cow. Steven had heard of a possible source eastward along the main road. A few miles down the road we found the old plantation where cows were reportedly being sold. To find a cow, we had to find the owner, Curly. We found his house, but he wasn't home. Temporarily, *Operation: Painim Kau* became *Operation: Painim Curly*. We were sent to a large village nearby, but he wasn't there. Someone reported he was out at a hamlet on the main road, but the directions were unclear. Back on the highway, we saw a man walking and decided to ask him if he'd seen Curly. He turned out to be none other than the elusive Curly. Yes, he had been selling cows, but they were all gone. He suggested we check with the cowboy at the high school several miles down the road. Now our mission was *Painim Kauboi!* We did find him at home down a side road behind the high school; unfortunately, the school no longer kept cows. He suggested we try to find a privately-owned cow a bit further up the side road and sent his son along to guide us. You guessed it—*Operation: Painim Praivet Kau!* We found the owner, but he also had no more cows to sell.

So ended Day 1 of *Operation: Painim Kau*. (We certainly had had plenty of *Painim* but had not even seen a *Kau*.)

However, on the way home we did add to the food supply for the feast. We visited several Aruamu villages along the eastern side of the language group and picked up their contributions for the feast. We didn't return empty-handed.

Day 2

The next morning we went a long way up the road past Tiap village, again collecting contributions to the feast. Bags of sweet potatoes and taro soon filled the truck bed. We also made arrangements to purchase a large pig.

The dedication was almost here and still we had no major source of meat. So—*Operation: Painim Kau* was on again! On the way out to the main road we talked to another man about buying his pig. He promised to have it ready on our return.

Having exhausted the possibilities in the east, we turned westward toward a place called *Banis Kau* (Cow Pen). At least the name gave us hope. After over an hour on a road that grew progressively narrower, we came to *Banis Kau*. Yes, they indeed had cows for sale! Ah, sweet success!

But not quite! The semi-domesticated cows were in a very large, overgrown enclosure and could only be located when they turned up for their daily salt allotment at 6:00 p.m. That was still 3 hours away. In the meantime, we went on another mission—*Operation: Painim Shotgun!* The cow's owner had a cartridge but no gun to shoot it. This mission took us a few miles further into the hinterland. The first man we checked with had loaned his gun to his children and they had taken it to another village. However, at our second stop, at the end of the road, on the banks of the mighty Ramu River, we found the needed gun.

Returning to *Banis Kau* with the gun, the time crept by slowly. At last, the much anticipated 6:00 p.m. arrived—but the cows didn't! Waiting again, we were told 6:30 was the more usual time. However, 6:30 only brought swarms of mosquitoes intent on turning us into pincushions—no cows! Sometime after 7:00, while we huddled in the truck for relief from the pesky mosquitoes, we were informed that the cows had come near and the owner was out with the gun looking for the selected victim. But it was well past 7:30 before we were instructed to drive the truck down to the enclosure.

After two days of searching and an interminable wait, just inside the gate lay the most beautiful cow I had ever seen. Well, not really! But it was ours! Very quickly, we wrestled it into the back of the truck and headed for Tiap. Along the way we picked up the very live pig we'd arranged to get earlier in the day. He did not much appreciate having to share the vehicle with a cow, let alone a dead one. Some time after 10:00 p.m., we arrived back at Tiap, where a small army was waiting to butcher the cow. *Operation: Painim Kau* had succeeded.

At 4:00 a.m. the next morning, the meat from the cow—along with a veritable mountain of sweet potatoes, yams, and taro—was carefully arranged over a thick bed of stones that had been heated until they glowed a fiery red. The whole lot was covered over with thick layers of banana leaves and water was poured in, creating volumes of steam. A few hours later the food emerged in sufficient quantities to declare to all in attendance that the dedication of the Aruamu New Testament was indeed a very significant and momentous occasion.

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ARUAMU NEW TESTAMENT DEDICATED

Notes

Editor's

On clear mornings here in Madang, I am able to look across the Astrolabe Bay and see the mountains of the Finisterre Range. Finisterre means "end of the earth." To the European explorers who first saw this incredible island and its awesome features, New Guinea must have seemed like the end of the world. Even to this day, it is known as the last great frontier of planet Earth, discounting the ocean depths.

When John Relyea chose Papua New Guinea for his life's work and ministry, he literally obeyed Christ's command to carry the Gospel unto the "utmost parts of the earth." He was a faithful witness of the Lord Jesus Christ, preaching holiness and encouraging people to grow in their prayer lives. "Don't stop praying!" were his final words.

This issue of The Storyboard focuses on John and on the culmination of his, Marsha's, and the Aruamu people's dream of translating the New Testament into the Aruamu language.

"Well done, good and faithful servant!" We miss you.



The Finisterre Mountains, as seen across Astrolabe Bay



"I want to purchase a Bible for each of my children. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

--Steven Dazim

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Once in a Lifetime by William Butler & Marsha Relyea

It was the most joyous of times; it was the saddest of times. It was the culmination; it was the beginning. It was a celebration of the past; it was a vision of the future. It occurred in a small, remote village; it was an international event. It was the focus of months of activity involving hundreds of people. It was an unprecedented moment in the history of a people. It was a "once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." It was the dedication of the New Testament in the Aruamu language!

The Aruamu Literacy Committee, who took charge of the dedication preparations, did everything they could think of to encourage every Aruamu to prepare for this day. They traveled to every village, armed with brightly colored posters with encouraging Aruamu slogans, to announce the date. They spread the battle cry, "An Aruamu Bible for every Aruamu home," throughout the language area. They promised special Bible bags, being lovingly prepared in the USA by friends of the Relyea family, to everyone who paid for their Aruamu New Testament in advance. They talked up the event at every opportunity. They challenged everyone to plant extra gardens. They sought contributions from politicians and Aruamus working in town to provide other supplies. (After all, what's a party without food?) They worked out the program for the day so that all segments of the Aruamu community as well as PBT guests were represented in the formal ceremonies.

Days before the event, it was obvious something big was up. International guests—friends of the Relyeas and representatives of PBT—arrived. Translators and literacy workers from nearby language groups where PBT also works filtered in, demonstrating their support for the Aruamus. Activity around Tiap grew to a fever pitch. Food was streaming in. Piles of sweet potatoes and taro daily grew larger in anticipation. Chickens, pigs, and a cow were arranged. Songs, dramas, and dances that were part of the celebration were rehearsed far into the night. Decorations lined the road in both directions, while banners proclaimed the coming of God's Word in Aruamu. Stalls where the Bibles would be sold were prepared. Then people from every corner of the language area began to converge on Tiap, some walking a day or more to get there.

As the fingers of the dawn of July 2 crept over the horizon, everything was in place! Before long, the program began with two groups performing traditional dances. What came next was a very dramatic and essential element of the dedication, especially to the Aruamu mind. Here's how Marsha Relyea described it from her vantage point within the drama:

"After opening greetings and dances, an Aruamu man named Apem acted out a drama of Aruamu traditions. Aruamus were very proud of themselves, and traditionally very animistic. The word *Aruamu* means 'big' or 'big man.' Apem skillfully acted out a representation of the quintessential Aruamu 'big man.' When Apem finished his miming, he stood at the front of the grandstand, with his staff planted firmly in the ground and his head held high, waiting....

"Then women dancers entered in full Aruamu regalia—grass skirts and painted faces and feather

headdresses—in a long processional line, doing a slow, weaving sort of shuffle-dance in rhythm with traditional drumbeats and flutes. Immediately behind them, I entered—also attired in a traditional Aruamu grass skirt, red body-paint, and feather headdress! I walked slowly, with the whole procession leading me, carrying the Aruamu New Testament on a small decorated podium. Then, right behind me, came two women carrying a huge purple banner celebrating the coming of the New Testament. When the procession neared the grandstand, the dancers separated into two parallel rows, singing 'Hallelujah!' and waving coconut fronds. I walked down the center of the aisle to the front where the quintessential Aruamu man, Apem, was standing, waiting....

"As I walked toward Apem, I could see that some of the Aruamu dancers had smiles on their faces, and some of them had tears of joy. I was walking in a slow stately way, trying to keep my composure. Every range of emotion filled my heart. When I got to the front near the platform, Apem was waiting for me. When I looked into his face, I saw that tears were streaming down his face. In a ceremonial way, I placed the New Testament in his hands. As he received it, I wept and I raised my hands high in utter joy and thanksgiving to our Almighty God.

"Then the Aruamus offered a prayer of dedication and thanksgiving. There were speeches after that. One speaker made the strong point that, even though the name Aruamu means 'big,' they now have God's Word, and they know that they are not the big ones. God Himself is the one who is the Big One."

In this dramatic way, the Aruamus welcomed the Word of God in their own language into their hearts and incorporated it into their culture and history.

There was no way in which the event could escape a certain element of sadness. The recent death of John Relyea was too much on people's minds. Everyone wished he too could have shared the event with them. However, the prevailing emotion of the day was joy and victory. And, arguably, from amongst the cloud of witnesses, John had the best seat in the house!

Reflecting on the slogan, "An Aruamu Bible for every Aruamu home," Steven Dazim, Aruamu Translation Coordinator, declared, "That isn't enough for me. I want to purchase a Bible for each of my children. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity." And so it was. From before the foundations of the earth, God foresaw this moment in the history of the Aruamu people. Now, in the last days, they have received His Word with joy so that it may infiltrate every aspect of their lives and culture to transform them into the people of God He has called them to be. Praise our Almighty God!

William and Robin Butler, who have been in PNG since 1979, work with the Waran people. Their daughter Bethaney, a missions major at Johnson Bible College, spent the summer in PNG as an intern. Their son Tyler works in the USA.

Marsha has been reassigned to PBT's International Service Center in Dallas, Texas. Heather is a pre-med student at Harding University. Brigitte will be a freshman at Ozark Christian College and Bobby, a freshman in high school.

It's Why We Came by Todd Owen

The work of translation tests the ability of each missionary to persevere through years of challenge, discouragement, and the daily grind of life in the third world. Occasionally, however, events come along that can give us that extra boost needed to keep on track. The completion of the Aruamu New Testament was one of those events.

Many of us in the PBT/PNG Branch spent months assisting the Aruamu Translation Committee (including the Relyea family) to prepare for a time of celebration, presenting the fruit of years of collective work to both the Father, as an offering, and to the Aruamu people as a gift. There were many days when Steven Dazim, Translation Coordinator, would show up at the office and we would work on details: contacting government officials and denominational church leaders, making lists of things to be purchased (such as 52 live chickens!) and doing all sorts of logistical things that were necessary to "do it right."

The weeks leading up to the dedication were filled with long days: early mornings and numerous trips to the airport, to Bogia, to Tiap. The day of celebration, July 2, 2005, made it all worthwhile.



Boxes of Aruamu New Testaments—the Word of God—arriving for the dedication

We arrived in Tiap to find the road decorated for half a kilometer leading up to the area where the ceremonies were to be held. Sing-sing groups were dancing, the village was filled with Aruamu language speakers, and dignitaries were arriving every few minutes. Marsha Relyea was secluded in a blind where the women were being painted, dressed, and

prepared for the presentation of the Aruamu New Testament to the representative of the people group.

As the speeches were made, as the drama showing how the New Testament came to be translated into the Aruamu language was acted out, as people danced and celebrated, as many tears were shed whenever John Relyea's name was mentioned, as translators cried over their own copies of the Aruamu New Testament, I kept thinking, over and over, "This is why we've come! This is why we've come!" ... and I shed a few tears myself.

The Word of God in the heart language of the men and women for whom Jesus died, its ability to transform and bring to life and empower God's children—for His glory—to live victorious lives in Christ: this is why we've come.

Todd Owen is currently serving as PBT/PNG's Assistant Director of Language Affairs. He, his wife Angela, and children Andrew, Samuel, Abigail, Hannah, and Josie live and work among the Somau Garia-speaking people of Uria Village, helping them to translate God's Word into their heart language.

He Sees Clearly Now by John Relyea

Editor's Note: This article was published in the Relyeas' first newsletter from Tiap during the summer of 1986. We felt it appropriate to share again; its relevance will be apparent.

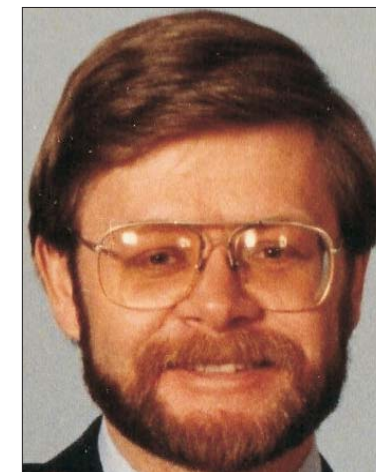
The idle chatter I enjoyed with the young men under the bush house petered out to an uneasy silence when we heard the truck approaching. As the truck came into view a deafening wail buzzed in my ears. Many hands undid the ropes and lifted the white, homemade box and carried it, almost running, to the bush, trailed by mourners. Mun mei, a big man in the village, had died.

Mun mei and I had a few things in common. Both Christians, we also needed eye glasses. But whereas my eyes often enjoy reading Scripture and other books, his old eyes had never known the joy of reading God's Word. Mun mei could not read. In hope, he had earlier bought a pair of glasses and would often ask when the reading classes would start.

The mourning chants that evening, from the Christians, were directed toward God; the

non-Christians called on ancestral spirits to be ready for Mun mei's coming. At the grave site the next morning I watched as his personal effects—tokens of his life's journey—were buried with him: his clothes, his tools, the little hat he always wore . . . and his glasses.

No doubt Mun mei sees things much more clearly now while we "see through a glass darkly" (I Cor. 13:12). His race is finished, and he won. It is now for other Papua New Guineans that we work to bring God's Word in their language . . . and the ability to read it.





Bobby is presented with the spear intended for John



Sing-sing dancers in traditional costumes



The Relyeas arrive at Tiap via helicopter



Brigette helps prepare food for the international guests



Bobby, Heather, and Brigette



Heather celebrating with the ladies' tambourine group



Tiap ladies prepare yams and taro



Apem and others acting out a drama of Aruamu traditions



Walking with the procession, every range of emotion filled Marsha's heart



Guest speakers at the dedication: From left to right: Jim Davis (PBT/PNG Director), Rondal Smith (PBT President), a local church representative, and Mike Sweeney (PBT/PNG translation consultant) [Not shown: Todd Owen (PBT/PNG Assistant Director of Language Affairs) and John Hickey (PNG Member of Parliament, Bogia District)]



The Aruamu translation team



Apem, representing the Aruamu people, standing proudly, waiting....



Marsha, attired in traditional dress, places the New Testament into the hands of Apem

Tribute to John Relyea by Harv Coon

Editor's Note: This tribute was written by and read at John's stateside funeral service by long-time forwarding agent for the Relyeas, Harvard J. Coon.

I would like to honor the Aruamu people of Papua New Guinea who are the beneficiaries of the life of John Relyea.

In times like this, family members usually discover insurance policies. I am sure there is a special one on the life of John Relyea like that which I will describe. It is written by *Living Sacrifice Insurance Co.* or maybe by *The Romans 12:1 Insurance Co.* The face value of the policy is *One Heart-Language New Testament*. Of course, the insured is John Robert Relyea. The beneficiaries are the *Aruamu People*. All of you have been paying the premiums for the last twenty years.

A unique feature is that dividends have been paid continually. The dividends have gone to the beneficiaries, the Aruamu People. I would like to describe some of these dividends by quoting from the *Relyea Review* newsletter over the last twenty years, mostly from John's writings.

DIVIDEND: The Aruamu are a Praying People

1983. "Prayer Needs: For God's leading of John and Marsha to the field and tribe of His choice."

1983. "The process of choosing a tribe requires sensitivity to God's leading; please pray that God will lead us to the tribe of His choice. Our prayer is that He will, even now, be preparing the hearts of those of our tribe to receive the gospel."

1986. "God connects Relyeas and Aruamus together."

Note: The Relyeas learn that the Aruamu people have been praying since

1979 for someone to come and help them get their own Bible.

June 1988. (Relyeas on furlough in USA) "In a recent letter from Tiap, our Aruamu friends write: 'We here in Tiap are thinking about you much and praying for you and ask God to watch over you while you are still in America. In our village we are all right. There isn't any sickness or death or hunger. We thank God for taking care of us.' They also write that there is still a dispute about the ground on which our bush house is located. We ask for your prayers that the two clans in Tiap would work this out between them."



Spring of 1989. **Land Dispute Prayers Answered** by John. "The land dispute is settled, in a way I have never heard of in Papua New Guinea. Normally, land disputes can drag on for years, sometimes with fights, until the matter is taken to court. In this case, the leaders of the larger clan, who we strongly suspect actually had the land rights, told the other side they wanted to see God's work progress, so they would give up claim to the land to settle the dispute. The other side, somewhat shamed by the maturity and generosity, decided that they too would give up their claim to the ground and give it to God's work! We

had a village meeting to publicly air the decision and everyone is happy. Thanks for everyone's prayers! The Lord really interceded in this one."

DIVIDEND: The Church is Alive and Growing in Aruamu Land

July 1990. **Church Growth in the Aruamu Area.** "On July 14, we went to a Church Dedication in the village of Wazangabang. A core of believers there turned to the Lord about two years ago. This year they completed building their new church building, which sports bamboo walls and a palm leaf roof, typical of Aruamu homes. Many people came to the Dedication Service to celebrate with the Wazangabang Christians. That day we rejoiced with them and the angels in heaven as twenty people were baptized into Christ in the stream."

DIVIDEND: Scripture is Alive and In Use

Spring of 1996. **Buk Mak Dedication.** Marilyn and I (Harv) attended church in the Tiap village church on Sunday. The preaching was in Pidgin, but the Bible reading was from the *Buk Mak*. We saw the people's faces and heard their tone of voice show the delight they had to hear the verses read in their own heart language.

Summer of 1997. **The Impact of God's Word on Lives,** by John. "Frequently, as we work with the Aruamu in translation we can see evidence of God changing lives. During our last furlough, a group of Aruamu Christians, because of some false accusations, had broken away



from the Tiap church and formed their own fellowship. Not my idea of church growth, especially in a culture easily given to dividing and fighting. During the checking of the book of Galatians we were working with the village checking committee to evaluate how well we had translated the terms which characterize the sinful nature (Gal. 5:19-21). When we came to the term for *dissensions* in verse 20, some of the checking committee were obviously convicted. They understood that by forming their own group without God's permission they were dividing the body of Christ. Within a short time there was mutual repentance by both sides and the death of the splinter church."

DIVIDEND: Death and Dying to be Understood

Summer of 1986. Mun mei, a "big man" and a close friend of John's, goes home to the Lord. [Please read John's story about Mun mei, *He Sees Clearly Now*, on page 7.]

December 1992. (Relyeas on furlough.) "Speaking of going home, we've heard recently from Papua New Guinea that Joe Iguasa, one of the real spark plugs in the Aruamu literacy project, has passed away. We'll surely miss him. I wonder, when I have my final homecoming in heaven, will I have to speak to Joe in Aruamu?"

July 2000. "We were privileged to attend a praise-memorial service to celebrate the life and death of a Christian big man who has gone to be with the Lord. Normally, death for the Aruamus is surrounded by sorcery, accusations, revenge ... not praise and worship! This was the very first service of this kind that we have ever observed among the Aruamus. As part of the service, Marsha was asked to read from the recently translated Aruamu book of Revelation ... about heaven. This was a very moving time for the Aruamus and for us as well."

January 2005. Excerpt of an email from PBT associates following a visit to Tiap to share the news of John's death: "Todd (Owen) finally had to tell Steven Dazim of the good/sad news of John's death. I think it really shocked him just the same way it shocked all of us here in town. We tried not to talk too much to let him grieve



accordingly. We told him that there was no shame in crying. We told him that we had been crying for two days already. Steven sent someone to hit the garamut drum right away. Then an older man hit the garamut underneath Steven's house. The older man kept saying, 'Ooooh, John! Ooooh, John! You went to heaven before me!' Amati was there also and wailed. Joe was there and just kept praying to God saying, 'Hallelujah! Hallelujah!' Both Joe and Steven made mention of the preaching that John had been doing during Christmas time about death and dying and how Christians have no reason to fear. The victory is won!

"The Aruamu New Testament has been translated, typeset, and sent to the printers. A final proof copy from the printers was handled and approved by John and Marsha on Saturday, January 8, 2005. The Lord called John home on January 11. He will see Mun mei and Joe Iguasa!"

The *Living Sacrifice Insurance Company* required that John's life would be used up and then the beneficiaries, the Aruamu People, would receive their New Testament in their heart language.

Harv and Marilyn Coon served as the Relyeas' forwarding agents for the entire twenty-one years of the Relyeas' translation ministry. They are members of the Relyeas' sending church, Central Christian Church, Fort Smith, Arkansas.