



The

# Storyboard

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## The Sociolinguistic Survey

by Mike Sweeney

What church do you belong to? What's the name of your language? Where's the nearest school from here? How do you say "man" in your language? How do you relate to your neighbors in other villages? Where do you go to get help when you're sick? Are you happy using a Melanesian Pidgin Bible, or would you use one in your own language? What language do your children speak?

Does it sound like I'm a bit nosey, or can you see a purpose behind these questions? They all have to do with sociolinguistic surveys. A sociolinguistic survey is generally considered to be a necessary first step before a Bible translator can be allocated to a language group. Surveys help us to evaluate whether a people group wants or needs a Bible translation. They help us to know if a language is thriving or losing ground to the trade language. They give us insights as to where a missionary should settle within a language group. They also help us to determine what the boundaries of a language group are. With over 830

language groups in PNG, many having multiple dialects, this can be a difficult issue to deal with.

Surveying is hard work. Some surveys take weeks to complete. And it's not just the grueling hikes, long canoe rides, or rough roads a person needs to contend with. It's getting people to understand both your questions and the reason for your questions. It's dealing with false expectations. It's eating and drinking whatever is put before you (sometimes it is best to close your eyes and pray throughout the entire meal!) And finally, it's learning to evaluate your data after the survey is complete. We hope the articles in this issue of *The Storyboard* will deepen your understanding about sociolinguistic surveys and how they can be used to make us more effective missionaries.

Mike and Linda Sweeney are translators with the Mum language group. Mike is a veteran of two sociolinguistic surveys.

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet  
of those who bring good news... Isaiah 52:7 (NIV)*

### Editor's Corner



*What is your idea of beautiful feet? Perhaps you envision the flawless, carefully manicured feet of a fashion model in a nail color advertisement. Those feet are actually worth a great deal - a value that is strictly monetary and very short-lived, however. In order to maintain visual perfection, walking (and definitely hiking across mountains) becomes secondary to "looking good." After all, we wouldn't want to chip our polish or break a nail. Obviously these are not the kind of feet mentioned in the reference from Isaiah above. Those "beautiful feet" are beautiful not because of the way they appear, but due to the service they perform. Many people in the modern world no longer walk just for the sake of getting where they want to go or in order to carry news to someone. We might walk around the block or jog along a specific course for exercise, but otherwise we get in our cars or take public transport. That's what people here in Papua New Guinea do, too - where there is a road. The problem is: there aren't many roads and there are a host of villages accessible only by foot. In that case, one has to depend on walking in order to reach them. In this issue of The Storyboard, you will read about the sociolinguistic survey - one of the first "steps" involved in bringing the Good News to people who do not yet have it written in their language. You will read about people who truly have beautiful feet and whose willingness to subject their feet to blisters, tropical sores, jungle rot, and the wear and tear of hiking over treacherous terrain is making the Good News available to those who otherwise would not have received it.*

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# Surveying the Land

by Mark Shreve

From July 6-27 we conducted a sociolinguistic survey of the Abu language group. Our survey team included Jim Davis and Kirby Weythman, as well as Diane and myself. We held interviews in 22 of 27 Abu villages to learn about their traditional culture, religious beliefs, social patterns, language use and attitudes, education and health. We enjoyed hospitality in each village and were protected from illness and injury.

We believe our goals for the survey were met. We learned that:

- The Abu have a definite need for a vernacular Bible translation/literacy ministry. Though bilingual, use of their heart language is not being surpassed by the trade language. Their traditional culture is still intact.
- There are three dialects within the language area. The central dialect is most recognized and could be used to reach the most Abu with vernacular Scriptures.

- Within the central dialect area, two villages stand out as good allocation sites.

We analyzed the social and linguistic data we collected, compiled the results into a formal report and submitted it to the branch directors for their recommendations. We have decided that the Lord would have us serve among the Abu people and our plans are to move out to the central inland village of Manemong on Nov. 8 to begin 6 weeks of language and culture learning. Please pray with us that the Lord would use this time to lay the foundation for His Word.

Mark and Diane Shreve just finished Pacific Orientation Course and are beginning the task of translation for the Abu people.

## Following His Lead

by Diane Shreve

These past few months have been a season of learning and writing. During our survey of the Abu people group we observed culture, wrote interview responses, documented word lists and journaled. We wrote to help us remember, to enable us to share with others, and to remind us how God has worked in our lives. I'd like to share with you an excerpt from my survey journal from July 20, a difficult day.

*We arrived in Binam at 5:40 p.m. after a 35-minute pull-canoe ride through the most beautiful vegetation we've seen yet. It was a ride with the current in a broad stream with vines hanging down and enjoyable people.*

*It really is a pretty village, right on the water with lots of children. Their skin is darker. There are more cases of skin disease. Their eyes are deeper. They seem suspicious of us. We are, uncomfortably for me, assigned again to the village's young men's house. Jenna (a national who was the only other woman on the survey team) will sleep at a sister's*

*house. She's uncomfortable in these men's houses too. I have no option.*

*We've set up our mosquito nets and our rice is cooking on the fire. The view is beautiful. It's impossible to explain the sights we are seeing, the wonderfully strange personalities, the swings of emotion as plans change, travel is arranged, people receive us, then send us off again. We want to say we will come back – but can't. We want them to know Christ, but the work of surveying is our purpose now. Evangelism and discipleship come later.*

*We want to be joyful. We want to be welcomed. We want to see truth come to these places. We want discernment. We want to understand them. I want in the midst of it all to maintain my sanity. How do I manage wet laundry, horrid outhouses, falling off log bridges, constant bugs*



Mark and Diane resting their feet. Travel by canoe is important in the Ramu River area.

*I've never seen before, traveling with nine men and one national woman who I can't figure out, plus the survey work.*

Some of you may be asking, "How did you manage?" Answer: Jesus! That morning I had read: "Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Colossians 3:17 (NIV).

When you know the purpose of your work and struggles, they are a delight. Survey was the hardest thing I have ever done, but the most rewarding. I have never felt more in God's will or more in need of Him than I did then. I am learning to be completely reliant on Him as He writes His words on my heart.

## Nend Survey Patrol by Norm Weatherhead

In November of 1998, I was introduced to a man named John from Kwaringeri. He told me that he helps look after a Church of Christ congregation up in the nearby mountains, and they speak Nend. This immediately caught my attention as I was only aware of Nend being spoken in the valley area around Pasinkap. Upon questioning him further, he said there are hundreds of people, living in dozens of villages up on the mountain, that all speak Nend.

PBT had no previous knowledge of this area and encouraged me to explore it. Plans began to formulate for a patrol (survey hike). It took a few months to put everything in place, select the team, make preparations, and send messages throughout the region with our schedule.

On April 15, 1999 Chris Urton and I, along with five national men (who carried our supplies and guided us through the jungle) set out. The first day brought us to the edge of the area I was familiar with, a few hours southeast of Pasinkap.

Along narrow trails, over tangled brushes and tree roots, through swollen riverbeds and up steep mountainsides, we climbed for five hours. Sweaty, dirty and tired, we arrive in the afternoon at the edge of Kwaringeri. We were informed that there was a welcoming committee awaiting us up ahead.

We were overwhelmed by the receptions given us here and at other villages. Some of the people had dressed up in traditional clothing – grass skirts, bark loin cloths, bodies painted up, decorative feathers. They beat pig skin drums and danced all around us while singing in Nend and Tok Pisin. The gist of the words were, “Welcome to Norm of PBT who has come to learn our language”.

The following days were very intense. During the day we traveled many trails to find as many of the surrounding villages as we could. We would meet with the people and let them know they were important to us and to God. The people were very warm loving people. The amazing thing is that Chris and I were the first "white skinned" people to ever visit their villages. At



*Norm Weatherhead, Chris Urton, and guides ready to start the Nend survey.*

night we would talk for hours about the Nend language and how we need to find a way to include the mountain people in the translation project down in the valley where we are living.

The findings of this survey have far-reaching implications. From our hike I discovered 15 more villages that speak Nend. This nearly doubles the number of people for whom we are translating. An important element of this discovery is that although they speak Nend, it is a different dialect than what we are using in Pasinkap. The challenge for us will be to find out how different the dialect is and how to accommodate what we translate down below for those up on top.

During our six-day hike we walked about 50 km of dense, difficult jungle trails. We climbed over seven small mountains, around many more, and forded streams (even walking for an hour and a half in a winding mountain stream.)

We discovered a whole new region of Nend speakers and are now presented with an expanding challenge of bringing the gospel to these precious people of Papua New Guinea.

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Norm and Jill Weatherhead are translators with the Nend language group.

## January Survey Coming Up

Chris and Lori Urton recently completed the Pacific Orientation Course and are planning a survey for January among the Ikundum people group. They had previously served here in Madang as support personnel from March of 1998 to June of 1999. They

have returned with plans to allocate and begin a new translation project. Please pray for them as they decide where the Lord would have them settle and work. They have left their daughter, Stephanie, behind in the States to attend college and their 8<sup>th</sup>

grade son, Ryne, will be boarding at Ukarumpa International School in the highlands of PNG. Chris & Lori will need a special measure of God's grace for this separation from their children.

## He has beautiful feet!

by Marsha Relyea

I sat in the doctor's office with Joe Orobi, waiting. While he was attending the supervisor training course, and was near medical help, I thought it was a good idea to get a doctor's evaluation of his leprosy problem.

Joe is my friend, my colleague. We have worked together on literacy and translation projects for many years. I have seen his commitment. And he has seen mine. He is like a brother.

He has hiked the Aruamu trails countless times, for the purpose of checking on literacy classes or encouraging teachers or holding literacy awareness meetings. He usually walks barefooted. Sometimes he is able to save up the money to purchase thongs or shoes, but it is never long before someone in his clan thinks he needs the shoes more than Joe does. And Joe is so kind-hearted, he invariably gives them away.

I had noticed a sore on Joe's foot the day before, and had given him some ointment and a bandage for it. Then I started asking him more about his leprosy problem, which I knew he had. He said that a number of years ago he was on medication for it, but that it hadn't really bothered him for a long time. But he

said that he couldn't feel very much with his feet or hands. I had noticed that his feet are missing parts of toes and his fingers are different lengths—not quite all there.

When the doctor examined Joe that day, she poked his feet, legs, hands, and arms with a pin, up quite a ways. Indeed, Joe can't feel things with his extremities; the leprosy has damaged his nerves. The doctor reminded him to check his feet and hands often visually for injuries. It is easy for him to have a bad cut or sore and not even know it, because he can't feel it.

The good news of the day was this. The tests the doctor did showed that Joe's disease is in remission, not active now. We were both grateful to the Lord to know this.

As I followed Joe out the door of the clinic, I glanced down at his gnarled feet and remembered the verse, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news...." My friend Joe has beautiful feet. The Lord is using him to bring good news to the Aruamus, by teaching them how to read His Word.

John and Marsha Relyea are translators with the Aruamu people. Marsha also now serves the branch as ADLA (Assistant Director for Language Affairs).



The survey feet of Jim Davis, Mark and Diane Shreve.

*Foot-washing, anyone?  
Even filthy feet can be  
beautiful when they bring  
the Gospel.*



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