

Coping Devices

by Mike Sweeney



Huff and Puff

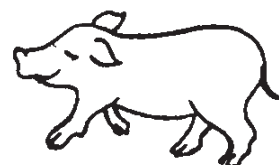
Of the beginning tasks of a missionary, the most miserable is learning a new language. Now, I'd done language learning before I ever came to the field—five languages, in fact: German, French, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. But, you know, I didn't really *learn* them; I just learned to read them—sort of.

Really *learning* a language is a different matter. Fortunately for the modern missionary, there are dozens of resources out there to help you . . . lots of wonderful ideas; libraries of drills, exercises, hints, and great advice.

None of it works.

The first problem you encounter in Papua New Guinea is that people like to point with their chin when they're talking. The second problem is that their mouths are always full of betel nut. So, for instance, if you were to say, in English, the phrase, "Look at that coconut over there," with your jaw jutting out and your mouth full of spaghetti, it would come out more like, "Lu ah da hohohuh oh deh." Just try to teach someone to speak English that way and see if he comes back to thank you later.

But the biggest problem is that people the world over are contrary. They enjoy confusing you. It's a source of amusement for them, so they can turn to their friends and say, "Hey, look what I made the missionary say! I'll bet I can make him do tricks too!" Okay, I may be paranoid, but that doesn't mean they're not out to get me. I'll give you a prime example.



One of the language-learning methods I tried early on was to take a simple story, tell it to my language helper in the trade language (Melanesian Pidgin), and record him telling it back to me in the vernacular (*Mum*, pronounced *Moom*). The idea behind this is that it helps, while listening to someone, to already have an idea what he's talking about. I did just that with my buddy, Peter Kundamaka.

Peter always did show more than the ordinary amount of enthusiasm for "helping" me, and when I suggested this technique, he agreed without hesitation. I should have suspected something right away.

So I told Peter the story of the three little pigs—a very simple, scaled-down version—just the basics about the pigs, the wolf, and the three types of houses. It took me about four minutes. Peter gave me lots of nonverbal feedback, laughing at both appropriate and inappropriate times, enjoying the tale to the fullest.

When I finished, I turned on the tape recorder and asked him to tell the whole thing back to me in *Mum*. And so he started—with full gestures, dynamics, and sound effects. A born thespian, he poured himself into the drama of the three little pigs for two hours. "What," I thought, "can these stupid pigs be doing that takes this long to talk about?" Obviously, there was a lot more going on than huffing and puffing. After an explosive finale, he paused for effect, said, "That's all!" and walked off to the sound of thunderous applause. (It was just me, but I clap loudly.)

Years later, when I had a better handle on the language, I found the tapes and listened to them again. Those poor pigs had been sent traipsing through the bush, performing singsings, planting gardens, learning catechisms, hunting crocodiles, and playing marbles. There was no mention of a wolf. There were no houses made of straw or sticks or stones. There was just Peter Kundamaka, enjoying my look of total confusion for two solid hours.

I rest my case.



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Introducing a New Team

by Gregory Ohrenberg

Rondy and I arrived in PNG in November with a variety of ministry experiences behind us. I preached for two years in Valparaiso, Nebraska and for eight years in Worden, Illinois. Since joining PBT in 2002, I have been involved in partnership development and recruiting. I also had an opportunity to preach in Guinea, West Africa during an investigative trip there in 2002. Now I am beginning my first full term of missionary service with PBT.



Rondy, on the other hand, is an experienced PBT missionary who has spent nearly five years in Guinea, West Africa. She did literacy work among the Toma speaking people, writing primers and training teachers before turning the work over to the Toma Church. She also worked in administration in Guinea and led an intern team there, as well as working for six months in the training office at PBT's International Service Center in Dallas, Texas. Before joining PBT, Rondy taught children in Missouri, Ohio, and Kenya, East Africa.

Neither of us had been married when I joined PBT and met Rondy. We tied the knot two years later in March of 2004, after a courtship that sometimes spanned the Atlantic Ocean. We have not yet been blessed with children.

Earlier this year, we made an investigative trip to Vanuatu, an island country with many cultural ties to PNG. (Several years ago Bill Bule, a missionary from Vanuatu to PNG, observed PBT's work in PNG and persuaded Church leaders of Vanuatu to invite PBT to send

missionaries there.) As a result of the investigative trip, this open door has been confirmed and we are preparing to become PBT's first missionaries to be based in Vanuatu. We have come to PNG for orientation to Melanesian culture and to learn from the wealth of experience of the missionaries here. We are planning to be in PNG until we leave for Vanuatu some time in 2007, if the Lord is willing.

We are very interested in helping with PBT's programs for training Papua New Guineans in translation and literacy work, especially the new programs being developed using *Tok Pisin* as the language of instruction. We think this will transfer well to our ministry in Vanuatu, where

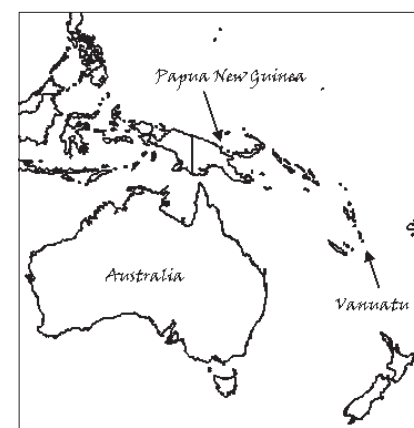
they speak a related Pidgin called *Bislama*. PBT's vision is to train Ni-Vanuatu people (people of Vanuatu) to do translation and literacy work in their own languages. In that way, a handful of North American missionaries in partnership with dozens of Ni-Vanuatu Christians can begin a Scripture Impact movement that can spread to all 105 local language communities of Vanuatu. This is an exciting time as PBT's PNG Branch prepares

to give birth to a new work in another part of the South Pacific. Rondy and I pray that God will use us to be a blessing to the people of both PNG and Vanuatu.

PBT welcomes Gregory and Rondy Ohrenberg to PNG. We look forward to working with them and helping them establish a ministry in Vanuatu.

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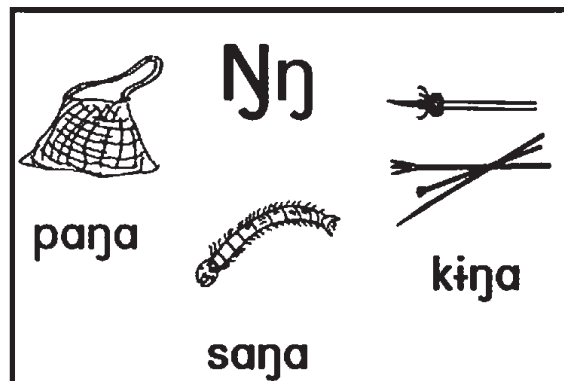
Literacy Trainers' Course, Module One by Kelly Robinson

(Editor's note: This year PBT-PNG, as part of our strategy to train nationals, began our first Literacy Trainers' Course. The entire course consists of three to five modules spread over two to three years. Six language groups sent participants to the first module of the course. Scott and Kelly Robinson were mentors in the course and Kelly shares here from their experiences.)

The PBT Literacy Trainers' Course (LTC) has begun. For four weeks in mid-August to mid-September, seventeen Papua New Guinean men participated in a course that began to teach them how to teach reading in their heart language.

Scott and I mentored two *Mum* men chosen by the *Mum* community to be participants in this course, Alex Mana and Lawrence Ikra. The course was held in Madang, so they had to travel to Madang, where they stayed in a house that is on the property of Scott's parents' house, built specifically to house nationals doing this type of work in town.

Not only did the course focus on how children learn, and on pre-reading and pre-writing skills, but it also had a main emphasis of producing material in the heart language. Pictured is a page from an alphabet book that the guys helped us put together on the computer. Alex and Lawrence wrote simple books about important things in their culture, (remember we're teaching beginning reading – think back to your



kindergarten and even preschool days!) like how to build a house, and a day in the garden. They also made alphabet cards, picture dominoes, blocks with letters on them, and much more. Because these are the first materials produced for teaching in the *Mum* language, not only are Alex and Lawrence teachers, they are also curriculum writers.

An added benefit to being in Madang was that the men were able to visit local schools for an observation and even a teaching time. On the last observation day at the schools, they read a story in the trade language, did an activity based on the story, and then came back and shared about their experience with the whole group.



Kelly Robinson, Alex Mana and Lawrence Ikra working on various projects during LTC.

Alex and Lawrence are very excited about the training they received, and this is just the beginning. There will be at least three more modules over the next two years. When Alex and Lawrence are finished they'll have the first year's curriculum

in hand and will have some practical experience to be able to start classes in the *Mum* language group. Their homework between modules varies. This time it is writing and producing seven more books each, getting ideas for different weekly themes, and doing some community awareness activities.

An exciting component of the LTC is that every morning, we sing worship songs and a devotion is given. It is a time where we as mentors have the opportunity to interact and show Christ's love daily with the participants.

Scott and Kelly are literacy specialists working with the *Mum* language group in Katiati. They partner with Mike and Linda Sweeney who do Bible translation work with the *Mum*. The Robinsons have been in PNG since 2003. When in Madang, they enjoy the company of Scott's parents, Dave and Chris Robinson, who also work with PBT in PNG. Scott and Kelly are currently in the United States on medical leave awaiting the birth of their first child.

Did You Know

One of the most famous PNG people groups are the Mudmen of Asaro. This is their story. Long ago, during one of their tribal fights, the warriors were driven into the muddy Asaro River. They emerged covered in mud. On their way home they ran into another tribe. By then the mud was all dry and cracked and they must have looked frightful. The other



warriors got scared and fled. After that episode, aware of the fearful impression it had made, the warriors of Asaro always covered themselves with mud before going to war, keeping the illusion alive.

Original artwork by Cindy Davis

If Christ had been born in New Guinea...

There would have been no animal to ride, but days of grueling climbing and descending through endless chains of mountains, ridges and streams... There would have been no Bethlehem, only a lonely little village on a hill... There would have been no manger – but a garden house, a cave or a lean-to in the jungle... There would have been no shepherds – just lowly women who sleep with their pigs... There would have been no wise men – for those from other tribes are suspected of sorcery and do not often venture into strange villages... There would have been no cross – the symbol of His death would have been a wooden spear or a bone arrow...

But – There would have been a resurrection – victory over death and eternal life... There would have been a message of hope and peace, of joy and righteousness, of freedom from fear, and of the knowledge of God... The New Guineans would be the messengers of the Gospel, and we would be the heathen... They would hold in their hands the message of life – our salvation would depend on their faithfulness, their vision, their obedience...

Yet – No matter where the birthplace of our Lord, His message of love and reconciliation would remain unchanged – precious and life-giving to all who accept Him.

~ Jerry Allen, SIL

Editor's Notes

Stay Tuned . . .

As you can see from Gregory Ohrenberg's and Kelly Robinson's articles, training national men and women is a very important part of our work.

Jim Davis, our Branch Director, stated in a letter earlier this year, "...we are becoming more and more aware that the future of the work of Pioneer Bible Translators rests in the training of willing men and women here in Papua New Guinea. As a result of this, we have voted on building a training center here in Madang."

Stay tuned – the Spring issue of The Storyboard will include our exciting plans for a training center, and how you can be a part of it!