



*45 Years of  
working with  
Bibleless peoples*

**Called by Grace,  
Led by Grace**

*by KWAN Poh San*



# **Called by Grace, Led by Grace**

**By KWAN Poh San**



Copyright: Kwan Poh San, 2023.

ISBN-13: 978-981-18-7540-3

Printed by: Economy Express Printing & Graphics Sdn Bhd  
6, 8,10 & 12, Jalan Perdagangan 3, Taman Universiti Industrial Park,  
81300 Skudai, Johor, Malaysia.

H/P : +6019-758 8808 (Justin Ee) Tel : +607-520 6366 (5 Lines) Fax : +607-520 6476

E-mail : sales@economy.com.my

<http://www.economyexpressprinting.com>

# Endorsements

Kwan Poh San was possibly one of the few first Singaporeans to enter truly cross-cultural missionary work, and her work that started in Papua New Guinea in 1977 and continued there for a quarter century, later spread to several other countries and spanned over four decades. Her background, training and experience equipped her in a unique way for both Bible translation, translation consulting and consultant training across a variety of cultures and language communities.

In this book, Poh San shares her memories from those years: encouragements as well as heartaches, sad events as well as funny ones, glimpses into the work, colleagues and cultures. A strong undercurrent is her gratefulness to God for his mercy and grace in Jesus Christ, his faithfulness in leading and guiding his servant, and the lessons he has taught her along the way.

I had the privilege to be Poh San's closest colleague for nearly 25 years. I am thankful for those years of learning and working together, honest and deep sharing of our lives, and fellowship in the Lord, as well as her continuing friendship. I heartily recommend this book for anyone who is interested in life outside one's own bubble, or wants to learn about missions, or about God's guidance in the life of one of his children.

Liisa Järvinen

*Board member of Finnish Wycliffe Bible Translators (2011-2016)*

This illuminating work gives us a valuable glimpse of a veteran missionary cum Bible translator's life and spirituality – we can almost feel what it is like to be living on the mission field! As we journey with Poh San, we also gain insight into how one discerns God's guidance and calling, how we live amongst the people that God calls us to, and how to grow as disciples of Christ. I am blessed to know Poh San, and blessed to have read her Memoirs.

Rev Dr Peter Wong

*Pastor of Fairfield Methodist Church (1995–2003)*

*(Rev Peter Wong visited Poh San in PNG as well as in her second field of work. He was also present at the dedication of the Mauwake New Testament dedication in 1999.)*

Poh San's memoir is such a wonderful and meaningful read. It is filled with very many interesting and engaging anecdotes, for example, how God called her into translation work, what it was like living in the cross-cultural mission field, even to cleaning boils for villagers.

She has provided an amazingly insightful account of her encounters and experience, and shares openly about her personal reservations, insecurities, joys, struggles and challenges in her work and relationships, and how God has seen her through. In short, Poh San's memoir has made me feel as if I was there on the field with her these past forty years. Praise God!

Samuel Soh

*Chairperson of the Mission Committee of Fairfield Methodist Church (2015–2022)*

The gems within capture inspiring testimonies of God's goodness and faithfulness when Poh San responded to His call, devoting four decades serving across two continents and working with various unreached people groups, before returning to continue her last lap of ministry back home.

Every story is written with authenticity and speaks of God's presence, power, providence and promises – promises to strengthen Poh San and His people, and help them face the different challenges they're going through and overcome them. The all-powerful God supported and sustained Poh San in His loving hands, provided kindred spirits who encouraged and served alongside her through the decades in the field. Even in the most trying of circumstances, and at the brink of death, God was always there, always present, always reassuring. And we are confident that our almighty God who has begun a good work in Poh San will continue to perfect and complete it until the day of Christ Jesus! Such are the promises of our marvellous God, Creator, Saviour and Redeemer!

Forty years of ministry in loving God and His people fervently through Bible translation work, humbly walking in faith and obedience, trusting in our unfailing God who abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness shine through the memoirs of Poh San. This is a must-read for all who are called to fulfil His Great Commission! Don't miss God's voice as you flip through each page filled with His loving grace and unending mercies!

Shermaine Tang

*Vice-principal of Singapore Chinese Girls' School*

*Vice-president of Yong-en Care Centre*

*Chairperson, Outreach and Social Concerns,*

*Fairfield Methodist Church*

## Acknowledgements

For many years, friends and colleagues have encouraged me to write about my life and experiences in my two fields of ministry, and of the many up and downs, or as a Chinese saying goes: the sour, sweet, bitter and spicy (酸甜苦辣). And finally, now that I am retiring, and have some time to reflect and assemble my thoughts and pen them in a readable way for others, I have decided that I will pen a few thoughts. And I wish to thank all those who have encouraged me, and walked with me.

I thank God for the unwavering support of members of my home church, Fairfield Methodist Church. And I thank them for all the love and support that they have shown to me through the years.

My grateful thanks to church friends, Shermaine Tang and Eunice Chong, who helpfully edited my initial drafts, and who asked many questions so that gaps in the narratives could be filled up.

Words cannot express my heartfelt thanks to Sharon Tan, an old friend, who has so competently edited my work and rearranged my random chapters to make them a cohesive and readable presentation.

To the Executive Director of Wycliffe Singapore, Charles Ho, who wrote the Foreword, and Rev Dr Peter Wong, Samuel Soh and Shermaine Tang, my grateful thanks for reading the drafts and giving endorsements.

And to Liisa Järvinen, my teammate of more than 24 years, whom I depend on very much to keep facts right, and who has kept me sane through the years, I will say in Mauwake: *Sira eliwa!* (good custom= thank you)

I would like to thank my colleagues in Wycliffe Bible Translators and Summer Institute of Linguistics with whom I've worked and who have taught me much, for enriching my memories with fun, laughter, sharing of prayers and hard work and all that pertains to life on the mission field. Some of them have been mentioned in these memoirs.

My special thanks to the staff and members of the Singapore Wycliffe Bible Translators who serve tirelessly and wholeheartedly for us on the field. All their background support for us on the field enables us to concentrate our energy and time on our work.

I wish to make special mention of my family members, especially my siblings, who covered for me my filial obligations to my parents. Their prayers and support encouraged me in many ways, and their regular letters 家书 kept me in touch with news of home. To them I say a big "thank you".

And finally, to you readers, may you be blessed as you journey with me through the pages, and may you come face to face with God, who wants to bless you just as he has richly blessed me.

# Contents

	Page
Acknowledgements	v
Foreword	viii
Chronology (1972–2023)	x
Chapter 1 “Since My Youth You Have Taught Me”	1
Chapter 2 Extracting the “Sweetness” of God’s Word	16
Chapter 3 A Cultural Chameleon	41
Chapter 4 Adopt, Adapt, Adjust	59
Chapter 5 Travel Tales	86
Chapter 6 Experiencing God’s Love	99
Chapter 7 God Loves in Practical Ways Too!	113
Chapter 8 Looking Back	129



## Foreword

It was the end of Poh San's sharing on Bible Translation at the Wycliffe Singapore's orientation for new members and interns. While Poh San 姐 (Elder Sister, as we affectionally call her) was packing up her laptop, I asked her if she had considered writing a book about her life and ministry to share her stories with more people. Her reply was that many people had in fact asked her to, and that she was considering writing a memoir but didn't have the time.

I am glad that she has finally found time to do so and this book *Called by Grace, Led by Grace* is a testimony of her 50 years of service and obedience to God, from the island of Singapore to the ends of the earth.

Poh San's journey as a teacher, Bible translator and consultant is a life "sharpened" by God – He honed her skills and personality to be conscious of the details and finer points of the Scriptures. This is reflected in the couplet based on her Chinese name as penned by an artist and calligrapher:

宝剑锋从磨砺出,      *The treasured sword has been honed by  
continuous sharpening,*

珊瑚晶莹耀人生。      *The coral's glimmer and shine reflect glory  
to life.*

Poh San's love for languages and cultures, and her passion for bringing God's Word to communities in their heart languages, are reflected in the stories she has collected in this book. Her desire to see people's lives transformed has impelled her to continue serving well

past normal retirement age. In her early years, many people taught and mentored her, were models for her, and worked with her. So, as a translation consultant and trainer in her later years, she has taken up the same roles as her mentors in order to train, mentor and build up the next generation of mission workers. In her own words, “the cycle of learning goes on”. To Poh San, there is no retirement from serving God.

As you read this book, it is my prayer that God will use Poh San’s life to encourage and bless you, and lead you to thank God for using her to be a blessing to many in different parts of the world.

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. (Rev 7:9, ESV)*

Charles Ho

Executive Director | Wycliffe Singapore



## Chronology (1972–2023)

This is a brief introduction of my life from 1972 to 2023, to provide a chronological outline for the events in this memoir. As you read through these paragraphs, you may have many questions as you try to fill in the gaps. The following chapters will help fill up those gaps.

1972 Resigned my teaching job in a government primary school.

1973 Began studies at the Singapore Bible College (SBC). While there, the call of the Lord to be a Bible translator was confirmed, and I prepared to proceed for training.

1976 Went to Sydney for a basic linguistics course provided by Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) to prepare to serve in Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT).

While on the course, my application to join WBT Australia was approved subject to successful completion of the field orientation course. WBT did not establish an office in Singapore until 1983.

1977 February – I went to Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the field orientation course. On the course, I met Liisa Järvinen from Finland, and we decided to form a team.

June – After successful completion of the course, I was accepted as a member of WBT Australia.

1977 Liisa and I spent a few months in Ukarumpa, headquarters of SIL, PNG Branch, and learnt more about the organisation and work there while assigned to different tasks.

December – I returned to Sydney for an advanced linguistics course, and Liisa also went as a teacher. Upon completion of that course, we returned to PNG.

- 1978 We were assigned to the Mauwake language and went to Moro village in Madang Province, on the north coast of PNG.
- 1979 Began translation work.
- 1985 Received training, and became a translation consultant.
- 1994-5 Took a 9-month course at Fuller Theological Seminary (USA).
- 1997 June – While preparing to print the Mauwake New Testament (NT), I suffered a very bad asthma attack, which led to my evacuation to a hospital in Cairns.
- November – We finally completed the Mauwake NT in 1997, after 18 years!
- 1999 July – We received the printed copies of the Mauwake NT, and held a dedication ceremony.
- 2001 I left PNG in preparation for work in an Asian country, to be a translation consultant for the teams there.
- 2002 Completed a Masters of Applied Linguistics at Northern Territories University in Darwin.
- Went to the capital of the Asian country for another phase of my translation journey.
- 2002-2023 Worked as a translation consultant and a trainer in that Asian country as well as in the Asia-Pacific region. My work took me to many parts of Asia, participating in seminars, teaching translation courses and Biblical Greek courses.
- 2023 Retirement



# Chapter 1

## “Since My Youth You Have Taught Me”



The beginning of 1973 was a turning point in my life. That was when, after 10 years of teaching in a government primary school, I switched to become a student at the Singapore Bible College (SBC). The four years of studies were my “desert rest”, when I learnt much from my teachers, but more so from my Lord who called me. I learnt deep lessons of faith from watching and interacting with my teachers and fellow students. And then reading and studying God’s Word brought me deep into his greatness, power and grace.

While in SBC, the call of the Lord to be a Bible translator was confirmed, and I prepared to proceed for training. A month after graduation from SBC in November 1976, I went to Sydney for a basic linguistics course provided by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in preparation to serve as a member of Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT).

While on the course, my application to join WBT Australia was processed, and I was told that my application would be approved on the basis of good grades in the linguistics course, and successful completion of the field orientation course. (WBT did not establish an office in Singapore until 1983.) In February 1977, on completion of the

linguistics course, I went to Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the field orientation course which I successfully completed. In June 1977, I was accepted as a member of WBT Australia.

It was at the field orientation course, in the early part of 1977, that I met Liisa Järvinen from Finland, and we decided to form a team. Liisa had been planning to go to Ethiopia in 1975, but she had spent some time to serve in her church, and then taught grammar in UK SIL in 1976. By that time, her sending mission body decided to assign her to work in PNG, instead of Ethiopia. So she went to PNG at the same time that I went there for field training. During the three months of field training, we got to know each other well enough to consider working as a team. I'm so thankful for God's planned delay of Liisa's going to the field.

Liisa was an answer to my prayers. For safety reasons, single women were not allowed to stay in the PNG villages by themselves. If they could not form a team with a female colleague, they had to remain at Ukarumpa, the SIL headquarters. When I heard that, I began to pray in earnest for a teammate. In my prayers, I told the Lord that since he had called me to Bible translation, it was also his responsibility to provide me a co-worker. I did not want to stay in Ukarumpa for too long.

During those two months of the field orientation course, we got to know each other well. Being the only single persons in the course, we were assigned to one group, and so did many things together. One day, I asked the Lord whether Liisa was his appointed teammate for me, and if so, to prompt her to propose that we team up. Without our knowing, staff members of the course were watching us and praying for us. Two days later, during our prayer time in the evening, Liisa said, "Since we seem to be able to get along with each other, would you consider forming a team with me?" I was delighted as that was the answer to my prayer. However, I said, "Let's wait till we have finished the village-living phase. If we can get along in a village situation, then we will make the decision." The few weeks spent in the village went well and we found that we got on well. That was the beginning of 24 good years of partnership in ministry.

We spent a few months in Ukarumpa after our orientation course as I was waiting to attend a second linguistics course which I had to complete before we could begin any translation work. At Ukarumpa, we learnt more about the organisation and work there while helping with different tasks. One of my assignments was to input corrections into the computer for a senior team's translation of New Testament books.

### **Going to the Mauwake people**

In December 1977, I returned to Sydney for my advanced linguistics course. Liisa also went, but as a teacher. Upon completion of that course, we returned to PNG, and in April 1978, we were assigned to translate the Bible for the Mauwake people. We moved to Moro village in Madang Province, a Mauwake village on the north coast of PNG.

The people of the village welcomed us, and we were housed in a half-completed house with one room enclosed for our bedroom. And so we began to learn the language, and translate the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament with them. I thank the Lord for Liisa and her life, and our work together. It was the Lord who brought us together, and by his grace we went through highs and lows together.







*Half-completed house*

After the dedication of the Mauwake New Testament in 1999, I was prepared to stay a few more years among the Mauwake people to promote literacy and Bible reading, and train more local colleagues to be teachers of translation courses. However, in 2001, an invitation to be a translation consultant for teams in an Asian country caused me to change course, and so I left PNG.

After a few months of rest in Singapore, and visits to friends, I headed to Darwin in February 2002 to do a Masters of Applied Linguistics at the Northern Territories University. At the end of 2002, I began another phase of my translation journey as a translation consultant in an Asian country.

From 2002 to the present, I have been blessed with many opportunities to work with teams from several countries in the Asia-Pacific region as a translation consultant and a trainer. I have travelled to several Asian cities, participating in seminars, and teaching translation courses and Biblical Greek courses.

Over this span of more than 50 years, I rejoice to have received rich blessings from the Lord, been a channel of blessing to others, and also received the Lord's blessing through them. Praise the Lord!

A long journey, of joys and sorrows, being taught and teaching others, being helped and helping others, being blessed and being a blessing, being led and leading others. At 70 I wondered if I should retire, but work was interesting, so I gave myself two more years, and then three more...

### **A preparation for missionary life**

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you. (Jeremiah 1:5)*

God knows me well. He knew me when I was in my mother's womb; He knew that I would be an Asian, a Chinese, speak Cantonese, and born during the Japanese occupation of Singapore. All these merged to make me who I am. Some may call it destiny. Believers in the Lord will call it God's will. I believe my birth was no mistake – the third child of a secondary wife of my father. All that would come together to make me fit into a niche which God had set up for me.

These are some of the preparatory things that God had put in my life.

Sandwiched between two brothers, it was inevitable that I was a bit tomboyish, to my mother's disapproval. I was constantly scolded for running around, and climbing the little hill behind our home (part of Pearl's Hill Park) with the boys. My love of the outdoors prepared me for life in PNG.

In 1957, when I was 13, our father's business had to close down. With no more income, mother had to work to feed the family. My elder sister had just started working as a nurse and stayed in the nurse's hostel. I was the next girl in the family, and naturally the household chores fell upon my shoulders. Cooking, laundry, house cleaning and minor repairs were part of my life from then to the time I left school. That developed in me a self-sufficient personality, with an ability to juggle my time between the many chores and studies in school. Besides all that, I was also tutoring Chinese school students in English and a few primary school students. The fees I earned were enough for my school expenses. In fact, one classmate remarked that she remembered me as an intense person, always on the go. I told her that I had to be, as every minute counted for me.

Friends invited me to join the Fairfield Methodist Church youth fellowship when I was 15 years old. There, I found meaningful friendships and fellowship. Organising activities among ourselves and inviting speakers to our Saturday meetings were part of my learning to organise things and relate to people. As others mentored me, I learnt to take on more responsibilities and eventually became the president of the fellowship. Those were years of growth for me spiritually, mentally and socially, as we teenagers and young adults met every week and carried out activities that we ourselves had organised.

During my late teens and early twenties, I faced multiple difficulties, including financial ones, mainly because we were a large family and were in some ways rather dysfunctional. During this time my prayer companions from my home church became my closest confidantes. Saturday or Sunday evening was our regular cell meeting. It was such gatherings and prayers that sustained me during such tough times. Our Bible studies and prayer times were the highlight of each week for me. I can't thank our heavenly Father enough for Pui Leng, Swan Neo, Choo Neo (Christina) and Luk Mui. They were a source of encouragement to me during difficult times.

We are different from one another, and sometimes there were differences and tense moments when we shared our honest opinions. Yet we stuck to each other, and prayed with each other. I appreciated each one of them, and continue to thank God for their presence and influence in my life.

Pui Leng was first to feel the call of God to service. She went to London Bible College. Writing to her while she was away in London, we continued our group relationship. The second was Choo Neo, who first started her studies at the New Zealand Bible College, and then returned to Singapore to continue her studies at the Singapore Bible College. We were classmates there, and enjoyed our time together in college. We kept in touch through the years, and although we did not meet often, being busy in our ministries and lives, they have been my great supporters and close friends. With grief, and also with joy, I joined many brothers and sisters in the Hiding Place to bid Choo Neo goodbye when she went back to our heavenly Father's home in June 2022.

While growing up, I loved to go to the old Pek San Teng (present-day very liveable Bishan), close to where Raffles Institution is now located. It was my aunt's home in a *kampung* (village) near the Cantonese cemeteries. I would look forward to my "vacation" place when my mother brought us for Ching Ming and other Chinese festivals with Cantonese operas. I loved to walk around the area, with the smell of pigs, chickens, ducks, and the pond over which the outhouse was built. I liked waking up to sound of cockerels crowing. Those varied sounds and smells reminded me of life and earthiness, the goodness of the land. That prepared me for the life that I was to live some 20 years later in PNG. Going to PNG was like going back to my childhood "vacations", a rustic life in the midst of nature.

Prior to my arrival in PNG, two Chinese ladies had been there with SIL. However, cultural stress and the outdoor physical life proved to be too challenging to them, and they left the field. I was the third Chinese woman to appear. Even while I was doing linguistics training in Sydney, several persons told me about the two ladies, and some concerned folks even suggested that perhaps I should go to somewhere in Southeast Asia instead. But they did not know that my early life had been different from the two ladies who could not adapt to the rustic outdoor life – I loved it!

When I arrived in PNG, I was observed for any culture shock or non-adaptability to rural life. It amused the director of the "jungle camp" (field orientation course) to see me walk into the jungle to slash trees or try riding a motorbike. He burst into laughter when I rode the bike into the kitchen wall, which fortunately was of asbestos, not bricks. The hole was left there, unrepaired. The trainers decided that I could survive the rugged life in that country. I'm not sure what grade they gave me in the course, but at least they told me that I did well enough, and did not suggest that I leave and go elsewhere!

When my father closed his business, he brought home all the contents of his drawers. Among those boxes of papers were many letters from my father's relatives, especially those from his father. Most of them were written with brush and ink on rice paper. Attempts to read them were frustrations, because apart from a few words, I couldn't understand them. Those letters were written in classical Chinese, not

modern Chinese. At that time, I was in Secondary One, and I struggled with Chinese lessons. In spite of that, after looking at those letters that day, I was determined to put more effort into learning Chinese. Part of my vacations were spent practising writing Chinese, and writing letters in my rudimentary Chinese to my relatives in China. I would study their replies, how they expressed themselves on certain matters. The English-Chinese dictionary was my companion. And Chinese was one the school subjects that I chose as an elective for my exams. Even after completing school, I continued to study Chinese on my own. Reading Chinese newspapers and magazines was my pastime.



A Chinese letter

My aim was rather narrow: to be proficient enough to one day read those family letters. However, God had already planned to use my knowledge of the Chinese language in my later years of service.

My love for reading my mother tongue led me learn to chant the “Three Character Classic” (三字经), and also the 4-character (千字文) and the 5-character (幼学诗) writings. This was eventually used by God many years later, when I was struggling with stress and tiredness after months of intense work. One night, unable to sleep, poetic lines describing the beauty of the landscapes I had travelled through surfaced in my mind. That was God’s way of helping me “let off steam” in the midst of constant travel and work.

History and geography had been my favourite subjects in school. Curiosity about the cultures of other countries and peoples was part of my life. I would avidly read newspaper and magazine articles on any country and any culture. I was fascinated by reports of how people lived and survived in different geographical locations, and read the *National Geographic* magazines whenever I could lay hands on them.

I would also read books and articles about missions work and missionaries. *Give Me This Mountain* and *He Gave Us a Valley* by Helen Roseveare were two books that I read a few times, and also the books by Isobel Kuhn. I would study how the missionaries adapted to life in less-developed countries. The lives and experiences of those pioneers spoke much to me.

Mrs Eileen Kuhn, who first spoke to me and led me to apply to join Wycliffe Bible Translators, was mentioned in one of Isobel Kuhn's books as Eileen O'Rourke. She had been a nurse in the province of my second field of service. How happy I was, when a few years after moving there, I met the house help who served them when they worked in that province. She was a young maid then, but by the time I met her, she was a grandmother in her 80s. A full circle. Was that a coincidence? Definitely not – it was the Lord's wonderful hand in bringing all things together.



*Mrs Eileen Kuhn*

In retrospect, I marvel at how the Lord orchestrated different parts of my early life to prepare me for work and life in PNG and my second field of service. He is our loving Father who knows each child, and lovingly prepares them for his own purposes and glory.

### **“Have you heard of Wycliffe Bible Translators?”**

For many years I had been interested in missionaries and missions, and had been praying for some missionaries who were working in Singapore and in the region. I had also been interested in the life and cultures people of other countries. I didn't know that God would use that interest and concern to call me to become a missionary.

In 1972, several factors caused me to consider leaving my vocation as a teacher. The most important one was that, whenever I had my quiet time, I felt that God wanted me to leave my job to prepare myself for full-time service. Conversations with friends also seemed to confirm that notion. At the Keswick Convention of that year, I stood up at the song *Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated, Lord, to Thee...*, and so I made a decision to do whatever the Lord had

planned for me. The preacher's word to those of us who stood up for that song were: "Some of you may be leaving soon, but some may be like Mary, sitting at the feet of Jesus." I felt that those words were spoken to me. My "sitting at the feet of Jesus" was to go to a Bible college to prepare myself to serve the Lord.

It was a "tug-of-war" between staying put and earning a good income, or leaving all to trust God. My family needed my income as some younger siblings were still studying. I found it hard to break the news to my mother. But then God confirmed to me through many Bible readings and conversations with friends that I should trust God and follow his call. I finally broke the news to my mother of my resignation from my job. She wept out of disappointment, and then she roped in a relative to persuade me to defer my resignation for a few years. It was a difficult time for me. The picture of my mother's tears was constantly before me. However, I felt that the timing was also important, and the time was right. Then one day, I assured her that I would continue to provide her the same amount of money that I had been giving to her monthly. I wasn't sure how I could keep that promise. But God in his faithfulness provided that amount through the monthly gift from my church for the first three years of Bible college. Friends also supported me financially, and I was very frugal in my spending. That faith also spoke to my mother of God the provider.

When I was studying at SBC, I didn't know that it was in preparation for missionary work; I was all prepared to work in a local church.

In the second year at SBC, I was struggling with my Greek course even though I liked the language. But I was resentful of the hours I had to spend studying the language, especially as I saw my friends having fun working on charts for the Christian Education course. But in the midst of that resentment, God showed me that I should pray to see how the knowledge of Greek would be important in my future work. So, I prayed, and in those moments of prayer, the name "Wycliffe Bible Translators" kept surfacing in my mind. I had heard the name once through a friend, and read that name in some Christian magazines, but I knew little about the organisation.

However, I continued to pray that if it was the will of the Lord for me to join the organisation, he would reveal it to me with words of confirmation.

The words of Isaiah 55:10-11 kept coming back to me:

*As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.*

It was telling me that my future work would be with the Word of God, and that it would be the weapon that would change the lives of many people.

At that time, I was going through a dry period, and was weeping before the Lord. At the same time, I was seeking God's guidance regarding being a Bible translator. My diary record of 31 March 1975 reads, "I prayed for guidance about WBT." The following day, 1 April 1975, the Scripture reading was Psalm 126, and the words of verses 4-6 spoke to me:

*Restore our fortunes, Lord, like streams in the Negev. Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy. Those who go out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with them.*

I knew that God was speaking to me that day, and like the Negev, I would be refreshed, and would go out and bring in sheaves with joy. I knew that the Lord was encouraging me to go ahead and follow his guidance.

At the end of that year, in a conversation with one of my teachers, Mrs Eileen Kuhn, I was very surprised when one of the first things she asked me was, "Have you heard of Wycliffe Bible Translators?"

My first thought was "How did she know that I was praying about it?" so in reply I asked, "Why do you ask me about it?"

"Well," she said, "I have been praying for you. I noticed that you have a flair for languages, and somehow, I have the feeling that God may want you to work as a Bible translator."

What a confirmation! And when I told her about my prayers over the previous few months, she was so glad for me. I was glad too, as God had answered my prayer through a well-respected teacher. So, I



continued to pray, and with the encouragement of my teacher I began my correspondence with WBT.

After many months of correspondence with the US WBT office, my inquiries were transferred to WBT Australia. During my final year at SBC, they asked if I would apply to be a member. Corresponding and finding out about the organisation and the work was all right, but applying to join the organisation was a serious matter. As a member, I would have to go and work as a Bible translator in locations where tribal peoples have no Bibles in their own languages. I would have to leave home. A decision had to be made.

I laid this matter before the Lord in my every prayer. Then in February 1976, SBC had its missions week with special meetings and talks on missions. At the end of a meeting, I went to speak to our dean, Dr E.N. Poulson, and told him about my concerns. And he said this to me, "You know, something strange happened this morning. As I knelt in prayer before a map of the world, your name flashed twice through my mind." Missions week, map of the world, and my name flashing in the dean's mind – I took all these to be God's confirmation that I should go ahead.

That was the beginning of my involvement with Bible translation. Upon my graduation from SBC at the end of 1976, I went to Sydney for the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) linguistics course. At the airport, as I bade goodbye to family and friends, my emotions were all mixed up. Thinking of those moments of leaving home, I penned these lines:

离家背园心忧忧,	<i>Leaving home, my heart was heavy,</i>
满面泪行谁分愁?	<i>Tears running down my face, who will share my burden?</i>
问主为何寄千里,	<i>Asking the Lord why he would send me thousands</i>
近处庄成缺人收。	<i>of miles away when the harvest nearby does lack reapers.</i>
我主爱世无限量,	<i>My Lord loves the world without bounds</i>
遥远他乡须悉闻。	<i>Villages faraway need to know the news.</i>
自愿献身为奴婢,	<i>Since I gave myself to be the maid of the Lord,</i>
愿去远处传此闻。	<i>I'm willing to go afar to spread this news.</i>

唯有爱主随身旁， *Just with the Lord by my side,*  
 飘渺处处可安心。 *Wherever I go I will have peace.*  
 仰望由主赐力量， *Looking to the Lord for strength,*  
 念爱思恩愿背家。 *Reflecting on his love, mindful of his mercy, I will*  
*leave home.*

(Best read in Cantonese)

Basic training for Bible translators included Bible college studies as well as courses in applied linguistics. A four-month field training course was also required before workers proceeded to the field. The linguistics courses prepared and equipped me with the necessary skills to learn and analyse an unwritten language prior to doing translation work. The field training course provided training in practical skills for living in environments in less-developed countries, such as lighting a pressure lamp and using a wood stove. Above and beyond those skills was the preparation for adapting to local cultures and societies. As I went through the training, although I found it fun, it also stretched me beyond my comfort zone and tested my capabilities. But by the end of the course, I felt that I was somewhat ready to face whatever was before me, be it culture, food, living environment, etc.

After completing my training in February 1977, I was accepted as a member of WBT Australia and went to Papua New Guinea (PNG) for the field orientation course. And so began my 24 years of living among the Mauwake people while learning the language and doing Bible translation in their language. The rest of this book contains my memories and reflections of the way God has guided me over 44 years in two fields of service, and what I have learnt about being a channel of His love to those who need His Word in their own languages.

### **Growing older**

I had reached my mid-60s and had been working in my second field of service for a few years. Those few years had been hectic, with much travelling and training of translation teams and consultants. And then, I started feeling overcome by tiredness, and there were days that I felt washed out by late afternoon.

Under these conditions, I was considering retirement. And I was in much prayer before the Lord, pleading for his guidance. One night, as I was deep in prayer before bedtime, I “heard” a voice saying to me, “Read Psalm 71.” Strange, as that was a psalm that I had hardly taken notice of before. Nonetheless, I opened my Bible to that psalm. The first few verses did not seem to address my need until I came to verse 9:

*Do not cast me away when I am old; do not forsake me when my strength is gone.*

I knew then that the Lord understood my weakness in my old age, and he was inviting me to trust in him, like the psalmist, and to pray to him about my circumstances. Old age should not be the criterion for stepping back from the task; physical weakness should not be the excuse to stop serving the Lord.

I continued to read the rest of the psalm, and verses 17 to 19 brought me to a deeper level of knowing and accepting the Lord’s love. Those verses read,

*Since my youth, God, you have taught me, and to this day I declare your marvelous deeds. Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your mighty acts to all who are to come. Your righteousness, God, reaches to the heavens, you who have done great things. Who is like you, God?*

The words “Do not forsake me, my God, till I declare your power to the next generation...” rang out to me, assuring me that my task will be unfinished until more translators and consultants have been trained, so the next generation of trainers and consultants will be well equipped to carry on the task of giving God’s Word to many peoples. I resolved not to focus on my condition, and instead focus on the tasks before me, and to trust the Lord for strength.

Then on a trip to Hong Kong, a medical check revealed that I was in an early stage of diabetes, hence the constant tiredness. From then on, I watched my diet, and have been trying hard to stay healthy.

With renewed confidence provided by the words in Psalm 71, I worked harder to help the teams to dig deep into the Scriptures, and obtain deeper depth in understanding. In fact, the Lord opened ways for me to improve in my skills in checking translations for the teams

from different language groups. He also gave me insight into analysis and interpreting of the epistles. Translators participating in the workshops on translating the epistles were drawn into deep discussions based on a set of questions that I had devised to enable participants to understand the purposes, foci and themes of each section of each epistle.

The Lord is interested in His own Word, that it is translated clearly for each people group. Hence, he turned my attention from my own tiredness and inadequacy, and gave me renewed strength at this stage of my life. He turned my feeling of inadequacy to an impetus to reach higher in my work.

## Chapter 2

# Extracting the “Sweetness” of God’s Word



To most people, Bible translation is not as exciting as evangelism and church planting, where workers can report on the number of conversions and the number of churches planted. Bible translation, on the other hand, is a more academic task, where deep study of the Scriptures is involved.

### **Language learning**

Before starting translation, we spent an initial year living in Moro village, having a house built and adapting to their culture. Another important task we had was to learn the Mauwake language.

Both Liisa and I, by the time we began living among the Mauwake people, were able to speak several languages. Liisa’s mother tongue is Finnish, and she also learnt Swedish in school, and a smattering of German. She speaks English very well, having done it as her major in university, and having spent several months in England. As for me, besides Cantonese, my mother tongue, I speak Hokkien, Teochew and Mandarin well. I did Malay studies as a trainee teacher, but my oral skills in that language are basic, having had little opportunity to use it while overseas. In Bible college, I learn Greek and Hebrew. So even

before we embarked on our work in PNG, we had been exposed to many languages. It was no wonder that learning Mauwake was not a big challenge for us.

Norma and Don were our regional directors. Norma wrote to Liisa:

“Don and I never forgot when we were assigned to give you a language test to check how you were learning the Mauwake language – the way you two took to a new language was like a duck to water. When others were struggling to get a few phrases learned in the new language, you two were already easily conversing with the villagers without any trouble at all. I remember that we told you, after observing you both as you squatted down on the beach with an older woman and were easily asking and receiving information in the Mauwake language, ‘We have already determined that you both have more than passed your language test and that there is no need to give you the regular test.’ But you both insisted that we go ahead anyway and give it to you.”

Kathy Snook, one of our centre managers wrote about me: “Poh San speaks a number of languages fluently, one of them being English. Her English is better than many native-born English speakers, and she rarely, if ever, makes mistakes commonly made by other Asians like mixing up the pronouns ‘him’ and ‘her’.”

My Hong Kong friends once said to me, “You do not speak Cantonese like other Singaporeans. You speak more like us.” Yes, I have been given the gift to hear and imitate the sounds and rhythm of words and sentences. It has become such a habit that, on buses and trains, I would unconsciously imitate the contour of sentences and phrases when people speak in a language that I do not understand.

Owing to the fact that I like the sounds of different languages, and am intrigued as to how each language is unique and very tuned in to its specific culture and geographic situation, language learning was fun. It offered me opportunities for further learning and discoveries. And after receiving linguistics training, the language studies proved to be even more enjoyable.

In spite of my linguistic gifting, learning Mauwake needed effort. I recall that in the early days of living among the Mauwake people, in preparation for building up my vocabulary on specific topics like “family”, “going to market” or “making pudding”, I would gather all the relevant words and phrases for that topic, and then venture out to look for my neighbours gathered under a tree or in other shady spots. Sitting among them, I would chat with them, and then would speak on the topic I had chosen for that day. As I spoke, the folks around would correct me, and repeat what I had just said to one another, using better vocabulary which I would quickly jot down. Then I would go on to sit with another group, and speaking on the same topic, I would use the better terms which I had picked up from the first group! That way, I quickly learned to speak in a natural way.

### **Translating the Mauwake New Testament**

With the help of Saror, our main language teacher, we started translation. Our first attempt at translation was Mark’s gospel which was done with a typewriter. That was in pre-laptop days. Each draft was checked with different persons in the village, and then we carefully edited and corrected each draft. Over several months, we went through 10 drafts before we could have it printed and dedicated. The people were so proud of the first book of the New Testament in their own language.

We give thanks to our Lord for the men who joined the translation team. Without them, we would have turned out poor translations. Their commitment to years of walking for three hours at least once a week to our house, and back home in the evening, revealed their great interest in God’s Word. Their desire to provide God’s Word to their own people was indeed praiseworthy.



*Translation team, with Saror in the centre*



*People buying Mark's gospel*



We were greenhorns in translation and other language work, so we continued to attend several workshops to learn the “trade”. We were so grateful to our senior colleagues for their guidance and help in language analysis and in translation principles. Through the years, while we continued to learn the language and translate the Scriptures, we also wrote and produced literacy materials with the help of Saror and other young men, so that we could teach the people to read their own language. That was also to prepare them to read Word of God when it was eventually translated.



*Literacy class*



*Literacy books*

PNG has more than 800 languages, and many needed translations. The various translation teams were all learning together. And as we grew in experience, we helped others in language analysis and translation. In the mid-1980s, Liisa became a linguistic consultant and I became a translation consultant. And so, while we worked on the translation in Mauwake, we also spent several months a year helping to train local translators and others.

Those were busy times, but also happy times, as we saw local people with a desire to translate the Bible into their own languages. We felt privileged to help provide training for them. With those added responsibilities, the timeline for our own translation of the Mauwake Bible was extended for several more years.



*Liisa training literacy teachers*

Besides translation we were also busy with literacy activities, training Mauwake men and women to teach their own people to read their own language. For that, we built a literacy house to hold the classes and to provide a dormitory for the participants.

After all the community checks and consultant checks, we finally completed the Mauwake New Testament in 1997. That work had begun in 1979, so the whole process took 18 years.

Many times, when translation teams were about to complete and publish their translation, the evil one would cause disruptions to delay the publication. In our case it was a very bad asthma attack which led to my evacuation to a hospital in Cairns in 1997. After three days in the intensive care unit, and a week in the general



*Kale reading the NT*

ward, I was discharged to recover for another week in a guesthouse. Altogether we spent almost three weeks in Cairns.

In April 1999, we received the printed copies of the Mauwake New Testament, and on a sunny day in July we held the dedication ceremony. An estimated 3.000 people from that area turned up for that joyous day. Food and other preparations started many days ahead to celebrate that important event.



*Blessing copies of the Mauwake New Testament*

### **Translation consultant**

As a translation consultant in PNG, I travelled to different locations to check translations for teams. Even as I checked those translations, I was also building up my own translation skills, which enabled us to produce better translations.

I love checking translation with teams. Although it is usually hard work, it is always satisfying work. After teams have completed translating a book of the Bible into their own language, they would “back translate” what they have translated into the national language of that country, or English. As consultant, I would read through that back translation, looking out for missing parts, or inaccuracies, or sentences that were not too clear.

Every time I peer into translations with the translation teams, looking for issues and problems, I cannot help but imagine God peering into my life and also my understanding of Scriptures. That makes me all the more seek to understand God's Word better by looking deep into his Word from every aspect – literary, geographical, historical, cultural, poetical, story-telling, and communication.

I recall that I was not a studious person as a secondary school student, and not given to details. As long as I understood a central or core theme, I would be satisfied. I was not interested in tiny details. This attitude to learning and textual detail was transformed as I engaged in Bible translation and checking. I was forced to look at details and communication from different angles.

Several years ago, an artist and calligrapher wrote this for me:

宝剑锋从磨砺出,      *The treasured sword has been honed by  
continuous sharpening,*

珊瑚晶莹耀人生。      *The coral's glimmer and shine  
reflect glory to life.*

The first two characters in the couplet written were based on my name Poh 宝 “precious or valuable” and San 珊 “coral”.

Through the years of work on translating the Bible, my translation skills have been honed like a sword, with constant sharpening, as the Lord honed my skills and personality to be conscious of details and the finer points of the Scriptures. I learnt to pay attention to linguistics and the beauty of each language. Sloppiness has no part in dealing with God's Word.

Translation also calls for the consciousness or awareness of the linguistic rules, cultures and worldviews of the target languages. That calls for respectful interactions with translators and the speakers of the language, to respect their views, and to be patient as they try to understand the texts through the grids of their culture and languages.

For every consultant checking session, some speakers of the language who had no knowledge of the passage being checked would be invited to join and help with the checking. Questions would



*Checking translation for another team*

be asked to ascertain the accuracy and clarity of that section. Often, by listening to the answers, we could discern inaccuracies or lack of clarity. Changes would then have to be made. There were several times over the years that speakers of the language would ask the translators, “Has Teacher (me) learnt our language? How does she know that there is a problem in the framing of the sentence?” They have been amazed that I could spot mistakes in the translation, and sometimes even suggest solutions to the phrasing of the text to make it clear. It appeared to them that I knew their language!

Translating God’s Word, or consulting for teams, is challenging work. Experience has to be built up and skills honed, in order to better translate God’s Word. After all these years, I’m grateful to the Lord for the privilege to touch many lives through helping to translate his Word into many languages. And I’m also thankful that my life has been enriched through interacting with God’s Word and the many translators who work so hard to give the Word of God to their own people.

### **The need for checking**

Why do we check our translations again and again, with as many people as possible? These examples show why!

*Ne maa eneka ifakimep Mua Maneka kuumeep patirak.*  
 And thing tooth kill God burn sacrifice  
 (animal)

*“He killed the animal and burnt God and sacrificed.”*

“No, no, don’t say it like that!” exclaimed the men in the checking group. We had a good look at the sentence, and laughed. The sentence sounded as though Jacob burnt God and not the animal.

Quickly we corrected it:

*Ne maa kuisow ifakimep Mua Maneka patir -om -ami kuumok.*  
*eneka*  
 And animal one killed God sacrifice-for- burnt  
 medial verb

*“And he killed an animal, sacrificing to God, burnt it.”*

We laughed at our mistake, but in fact translation is not a laughing matter.

At another checking session, Liisa and some men were checking the transfiguration account in Mark’s gospel when one man asked, “What kind of body did Jesus have at that time?” Liisa’s answer was, “His body became different, that’s what this sentence says.”

“Yes, I know it is different, but how?”

“His body was full of light and was white.”

“But why does this sentence say that his body was full of holes?”

*Yeesus mia ono-on- aiya kererek.*  
 Jesus body different/hole with became  
 [ona “hole”; ono-ona “holes”; ono-onaiya “with holes”; onaiya “different”]

So, what should be done? We added *sira* (manner) before *ono-onaiya* to make it mean “different”.

*Yeesus mia sira ono-onaiya kererek.*

Repeated checking ensures that we catch as many mistakes, inaccuracies and lack of clarity as possible before publication. We dare

not take short cuts, neither can we assume that we have done well even in the second or third drafts.

### **Training translators and consultants**

I left PNG in 2001, and from 2002, I have served as a translation consultant and a trainer for my colleagues in Asia. I was based in an Asian country until 2019, where my work took me to many provinces, cities and towns, but have been based in Singapore since 2019. I have also been involved in training translators and consultants in the Asia-Pacific region. Those duties took me to several Asian cities, participating in seminars, teaching courses in translation and Biblical Greek. I enjoyed those interactions with colleagues Asia-wide.

One of the greatest satisfactions for me was the training of mother tongue translators. Many people in the two fields that I have served in are very interested and committed to having the Bible translated into their own languages. However, they needed training, so several colleagues and I committed ourselves to that. Every year, several training sessions were held to provide training to mother tongue translators. Each team would go through at least three courses dealing with basic translation principles, Biblical and Jewish background, and translating the epistles.

After years of such training and working on translation, the mother tongue translators would be well equipped to be Bible teachers in their churches, teaching the Word clearly to the believers, and strengthening the believers and the churches.

Teaching translation is not just about theology, but also about linguistics and communication. We wanted to help students see that God is a great communicator who wishes to speak directly to his people. God spoke and taught his people through imagery, poetry, songs, actions, prophetic words and actions, through nature, through his creation, etc., not only through narratives. Translators have to make the Scriptures come alive through our translations so that God is shown to be alive and powerful.

When teaching basic translation principles, I would often tell the participants that producing good translations is like cooking the best

Chinese soups. Chinese have different ways of cooking soups, but the best soups come out of slow cooking meat and bones, called 熬“*ngaau*” (in Cantonese). I explained that meat bones are simmered for hours till the soup is full of the goodness and “sweetness” of the meat and bones. In the same way, the more time spent on working through a passage of Scripture, thinking through different aspects of the passage and ways of making it clear, the “sweeter” the passage will be to the hearers. I told them that if they forgot all the details, they needed to remember *ngaau* when they are dealing with their translations. Many of the translators would remember *ngaau*, and whenever I met them again, they would, in jest, say *ngaau* to me. That is something that I treasure.

### **Students I recall with thanksgiving**

#### ***Stephen***

I thank the Lord for Stephen. He was taking the National Translators Course (NTC) 2 in the room next to ours. He would walk over to the door of our classroom, and stand there listening in our discussions about translating the epistles. Initially I was rather irritated by his not sitting in his own class and doing his work, but I later discovered the reason for his behaviour. When he heard that I was going to leave PNG soon, he requested me to teach that same course before I left the following year, instead of two years later. He had found our discussions so interesting that he was anxious to do that course soon.

Stephen was an intelligent young man, but at one stage, an angry one. Both his grandfather and then his father had worked as translators for their language group. Financially, they were always constrained, and the family struggled to pay for his school fees. He vowed that he would never have anything to do with such work. However, later, as he saw how his father was struggling to understand the Old Testament (OT) with his limited English, his heart was softened, and he gave up his job to return to the village to work on translating the OT with his father. He registered for the NTC which was when I met him, standing at our door listening to our discussions. Stephen is now a supervisor for several translation teams with Bible Translation Association of PNG.



### ***Daniel***

Daniel of Bougainville had already done a translation of Matthew before attending NTC. He then decided to throw away that first translation and start all over again after he learnt how to communicate clearly in his language, and not translate the narrative sentence by sentence. He felt that in his previous translation, Jesus Christ was just speaking words without showing any emotions, and there was no the power in his words.



*Selby & Stephen*

### ***Selby***

Selby was a good artist, and his paintings adorn several government buildings in Port Moresby. I treasure the two paintings that he specifically painted and presented to me as a farewell gift. I met Selby at a translation course, and we got to know each other well. After he started on translating the Bible into his own language, he also organised translation teams for six other language groups, and arranged training for them. This was what he wrote in one of his letters to me: "I praise God for His timely programme in which He brought you in so I will be a student in your class. You taught me good, more than teaching, your motherlike approach made me learn more. When I make mistakes I felt safe because you were the(re) to correct me.... You helped open the door into my future...."

We kept in touch for some years after I left PNG. I was concerned and prayed for him, especially for his health. I was deeply saddened when I received news of his passing away. But I know that the good work that he had done among his people will bring glory to God. This was what he wrote to us: “My people read the translations that I had done after my training, and compared it to the work done years ago by an expatriate translator. They said to me, ‘You are an Omie son, so you write like the way we speak. When we read the old translation, it is as though we take two steps forward, and then have to loop back to understand what it says. It does not speak like our language.’ I know that with adequate training I could translate well on my own.”

### **Transforming the lives of the translation team**

*For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12)*

In Moro village, we started with a translation team comprising a group of men who walked for three hours at least once a week to our house, and back home in the evening. They kept going because of their great interest in God’s Word and their desire to provide God’s Word to their own people. Over the years, we saw how their continual exposure to God’s Word changed their lives.

Except for Saror, who was paid regularly, none of these men were given any financial remuneration. They received provisions of food and other items at the end of the year for Christmas and New Year. But I’m sure that when they reach heaven, their welcome will be, “Welcome, you faithful servant, to the house of your Father.”

### **Saror**

Although we generally avoided listening to gossip so that we would not be sucked into village quarrels and squabbles, some of the gossip we received was useful information, and could help us understand relationships and village politics.

One day, our village mama sat down with us to have a chat. “Let me tell you a secret,” she started. This was the secret: Saror, our main

co-translator, was born one of twins; the other was a girl. In those days twins generally could not survive because mothers normally would not have enough milk to feed two babies. Therefore, it was the common practice that the weaker one of the twins would be killed. Our village mama was a young girl then, and she was peeking between the bamboo slats into the hut where Saror's mother was giving birth. Twins were born, and one of the women there laid a pillow on the baby girl's face to smother her. And later, the little one was quietly buried with the afterbirth.

Saror was a shy, quiet and taciturn man. He seldom smiled. It sometimes seemed like he was under a dark cloud. I once remarked to a friend that even if he had been given a million dollars, he would find it hard to smile. Although he worked with us on translation, the work did not impact him very much. He continued to be addicted to chewing betel nut and would occasionally get drunk on beer. Baptised a Roman Catholic like many of the people in the village, he hardly went to church and cared little about spiritual matters. We were praying very hard for him to have a closer relationship with God.

One night, while we were in Ukarumpa to teach in a translation course, I was praying for Saror, with tears, asking the Lord to help him have a spiritual breakthrough. Then the Lord reminded me of something I had read a few days ago: that when something happens to one of a pair of twins, the trauma will affect the other one. I recalled the conversation I had with our village mama about Saror's birth. Death was what happened to Saror's twin sister. He was affected by death! It was no wonder that he was always moody; and would hardly ever laugh. Death weighed on him and darkened his world. That night, in the name of Jesus, I cut off his ties with his dead twin, and declared him free from death. The following nights, I continued to pray for him.

Around the same time, in the village, God was working in Saror's heart. He began to feel the weight of sin; and prayed for God's mercy. One night he had a vivid dream. In that dream, he saw himself on top of a cliff, and Jesus standing on the opposite cliff. He was calling to Jesus to help him. Then he saw the cross laid between the deep chasm

between the cliffs, and he walked across to Jesus. That night he became a believer.

When we returned to the village, we saw a changed man. He was still a quiet person, but he smiled more often and was less moody. He joined the new Christian group in the village and gave up chewing betel nut. Only God could have made that breakthrough in his life.

### *Matuwina*

Matuwina had been coming every Wednesday to help us check the Mauwake translation of the NT. Although he hardly went to church, he was very faithful in coming to check the translation, and he always had some spiritual insight into the meaning of God's Word. He was often able to suggest good alternative words or phrases to make the translation clear. However, we were initially suspicious of his motives. This was because some who came to help expected a return for their help, either monetary or in kind. We were waiting for him to voice his "request".

However, a few years passed, and no such request came. We were surprised that he had not even asked us to help pay for his children's school fees. During our coffee break one day, we asked him what kept him coming week after week. This was his answer: "I was going to church, and I listened to the sermons preached by the priests and



*Saakawa, Matuwina & Lukas*

catechists, but then I observed the lives around me, and found that the priests and all the catechists did not live according to what the Bible said. I want to know what the Bible actually says. And that is the reason for my coming to check the translation, I want to know what God really says in the Bible. And since coming to work with you, I've learnt a lot." The years of involvement in the translation work helped Matuwina become a more committed Christian, and he joined the new Christian group, and changed his ways.

Before Matuwina became a born-again believer, he had been through several bouts of relationship problems within his family due to his hot temper. One notable incident was his suspicion that his younger brother was carrying on with his wife. One day he became so incensed that he speared that brother in the leg. That incident caused an uproar in the village, and in shame, Matuwina stopped coming to help check our translation. It was only after he made up with his brother that he returned to work with us.

### ***Saakawa***

Saakawa was a beloved son of God, a gentle person, and had much spiritual insight. He started attending Bible classes with Fr Jooren, the Roman Catholic priest and chaplain of the nearby high school. He was one of the first men to join our translation committee, and was the most respected person in the committee. This was because he had a gift for retelling the gospel accounts as we read through each section. His retelling was so good that we would listen carefully and quickly jot down the phrases and words that he used. That improved the clarity and fluency of language in our translation.

Once, a young man in Saakawa's village was very sick, and nothing, neither medicine nor healing magic, could heal him, and he was strangely wasting away. One day, God gave insight to Saakawa, and he asked the young man, "Have you cursed yourself?" And the reply was, "Yes, I was so unhappy with life at one time, that I cursed myself, that I would die." Saakawa counselled him, and persuaded him to trust in Jesus for healing, and the young man confessed his sin and accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour. From that day, he regained strength and was healed.

Despite his obedience to God, and his spiritual insight, Saakawa was at one time deeply affected by the death of both his daughter-in-law and his grandson within a short period of time. He was very tempted to return to the traditional rituals to find out if the cause of their deaths was through broken relationships or sorcery. Matuwina and another man in the committee advised him not to do so. During that period, he stayed away from our translation checking sessions; we and our supporters prayed continuously for him. Eventually, after a year's absence, he returned to work with us.

### *Nimbulel*

Nimbulel was a traditional Mauwake man. When he first came to help with checking the translation, he told us that he was reluctant to come as he hardly knew the Bible and hardly attended church. Our answer was that he was exactly the kind of person we needed. We encouraged him to ask questions about the sections he did not understand. His genuine



*Nimbulel*

interest and frequent innocent questions helped us to improve our translation. And to our delight, he would also provide us with very appropriate phrases to express what was needed. Although he did not make any confession of faith, his interest in God's Word encouraged us that he would one day make the step of faith. During the time spent with us checking the translation, he gradually realised the power of Jesus Christ, and that he would protect those who trusted him. This was very reassuring for Nimbulel, who, like many Mauwake men, was very fearful of sorcery. He learnt that the Jesus who performed so many miracles is the One who has all the power to protect.

### **Mentoring**

Reading the gospels, I observed how Jesus, the greatest mentor on earth, related to his disciples. He spent most of his time with his disciples, except when he went away to pray and spend time with God. I realised that being with people all the time entails commitment, and it also means exposing oneself to examination and criticism.

Frankly, it is not my natural inclination to do so. I tend to shut people out of my life, if and when they are of no use to me. Having grown up facing constant disapproval from my mother, I had a sense of inferiority, of having to prove myself to others constantly, always being afraid that I would not measure up.

However, my involvement in the NTC in PNG meant that mentoring the participants would be inevitable. That became even more so when the training group felt the urgency to train the national translators to be trainers themselves. Despite my own hesitancy to be a mentor, I'm thankful to the Lord for opportunities to mentor some colleagues.

I recall how my classmates and I were mentored in SBC by Mrs Eileen Kuhn, our Christian Education teacher. Apart from teaching us in class, she asked us to assist her in running a weekly children's meeting. We watched how she ran the group and dealt with the children. We were also instructed in what to do, and how to handle the children. She was actually mentoring us to work with them, and patiently guiding us by modelling principles in Christian education. I remembered those principles and her kindness to us for several years after that. I have always been grateful to Mrs Kuhn for her skilful mentoring. Whenever I was faced with problems in the field, I would recall those days of learning from her, and ask myself how she would have dealt with it.

I noticed that in Jesus' teaching of his disciples and others, he would begin with what they knew of God and the Scriptures. He often began with, "Do you not know...?" He would build on that knowledge and challenge them to see his Kingdom values and his Kingdom views. So, I tried to follow our Lord's way when working with my colleagues and mentees, by building on their knowledge and skills.

### ***Duncan***

Duncan loved being with people, and as Vice-Principal of the translation courses, he looked after the participants very well. His popularity with them was evident. Teaching the course was another matter. He claimed that he could not teach, and initially lacked confidence, so we worked together to help him gain confidence. I liked

working with Duncan and discussing work with him. At the beginning, he felt overwhelmed, but eventually was willing to try his hand at teaching different modules of the courses. With increased confidence, Duncan led the courses for several years. Besides that, he has also become a very competent translation consultant, very much welcomed by the teams.

### *Kidu*

Another colleague I worked with was Kidu. Initially, he was a pastor in the local church, but gave up that ministry to be a Bible translator for his own language group in cooperation with a German member of WBT. After several years, he completed the translation of the NT in his own language and was recruited to be a trainer. It was a pleasure for me to work with him as he was eager to learn. We discussed work, and how to set up lesson plans. One day, he said to me, "You are the first teacher who has asked me what I know; and begin from there. No one else has done that to me. They usually direct me to 'Do this, do that'. It shows that you have respect for me." That was a great surprise to me, and I thank God for all who had mentored me, so that I could be a kind mentor to people like Kidu.

Kidu and I worked well together, and he soon was teaching confidently in the translators' courses. In my association with him, I also looked out for his moods. Once, I noticed that he looked very moody and worried. It turned out that one of his sons had been asked to leave school because he had not paid the school fees. To encourage him, I passed him the amount out of my ministry funds to help with the fees. Kidu has 9 children, and paying their school fees had been a big worry. I'm so very glad that his children have all grown up, and several have remained strong Christians, and some are supporting their father as he works as a translation consultant, helping teams to improve their translations.

In 2002, when Kidu heard that I was going to Port Moresby to finally leave the country, he came with his wife and their youngest daughter to see me. He told me that they had wanted very much to come to the city to say goodbye to me; but lacked the funds to pay for the fare from their village to the city. That did not deter them. They



walked to his in-laws' village, stayed there for a week catching mud crabs, which they sold, and managed to raise enough for their fares to town. Their account moved me to tears – such dear friends.

In my second field of work, training and mentoring was the main part of my work. Mentoring translation consultants was a great opportunity to get to hone my skills, and to know my mentees better.

### *“Emily”*

I was assigned to mentor Emily in the early 2000s. She had had a hard life before I met her. Widowed in a vehicle accident a few short years after her marriage, and at the same time losing her little daughter, she went through many difficult and lonely years. By God's grace, several years after that, she became a believer through the prayers of her faithful mother and others. But the trauma she had suffered left many deep scars in her thoughts and emotions. She is academically bright, and she loves to study. But by the time I met her, she had built up a strong fence to protect herself emotionally. Outwardly, she was calm, and would work hard to stay on good terms with people and avoid trouble, even to her own disadvantage. But she was afraid to make decisions and take on any leadership role. There were many ups and downs in our relationship as I served as her mentor through the years.

Initially, Emily harboured great suspicion about my motives in mentoring her, convinced that my only interest in her was as a worker for Bible translation. She did not believe that any person outside her family would render unconditional help to her. Even after I had arranged for her to study at my alma mater in Singapore, her suspicions remained as she felt that I was only interested in equipping her as a Bible translator. It took much effort and reassurance over the years to ease her suspicions. I have also often examined my motives in helping her to further her studies, and in seeking financial support for her during those years. But in honesty, I would say that it was God's call to me to be her mentor to guide her through the years. My motive was purely to provide further training for one who loves the Lord, for her own sake.

Through my relationship with Emily, I learnt to be patient, to allow the Holy Spirit to heal those deep scars, and to be someone that

she could feel safe with. We have reached the point where she is comfortable enough to lose her temper with me, and to trust me enough to be frank. Although she is still a work in progress, I see her as an unpolished gem in the midst of God's workers: a willing and humble servant, one who is very conscious of her own weaknesses and her dependence on God and others.

### *"Joy"*

In contrast, Joy, one of my other mentees, is a self-confident person. Growing up in a family of several loving, older brothers who doted on their youngest sibling and only girl in the family, she is a happy and emotionally content person. She was a member of the translation team for her own language, and we first met when I checked their translation for them. I got to know her better when I stayed at her home at another time. Later, when she was training to be a consultant, we spent more time together while travelling to different locations. It was good for me to spend time with a younger person (35 years younger), and to see the world through her eyes. Besides work, we also took opportunities to make side trips to relax after checking sessions. Her favourite way of relaxing is to sit around chatting over a cup of coffee. That is one side of her personality.

Being a friendly, helpful and loving person, Joy has no lack of people calling on her. Her network of friends is vast, and she is constantly busy with running errands and comforting friends. Her home is a transit point for many people, and she is kept busy cooking for them. I initially classified her as an extrovert, but she has denied that. She says she learnt extroverted behaviour and forces herself to be sociable for others. It is no wonder that her quiet moments over coffee were so essential to her. I have leaned on her sometimes for support, and she also made time for me to reflect on matters with her. Watching her, I too have learnt to be more open to others. In fact, sometimes, our homes, which were in the same housing complex, would take the overflow of guests from each other's homes.

Joy was very concerned for me as I travelled from location to location to work with teams. Once, I was returning to my home city by long-distance bus. On reaching the bus terminus, I was very touched that she was waiting for me with transport. She was concerned that I

had travelled since the break of dawn, and it would be hard to find a taxi home. I'm thankful to the Lord that in a foreign land, I had a younger person who was concerned for me. I was also thankful that I had other younger persons to relate to, and to relax with over picnics, prayer meetings and parties.

### *"Shelley"*

Shelley is one person who tugs at my heart. Her struggles and tears were constantly before me. She and her husband were missionaries who moved from another part of the country to the southwest of the country. Wishing to be financially independent, they set up a computer repair and photocopy business. Their business gave them the opportunity to train young people in the business, and then send them to the smaller towns as tentmakers. I met them when I taught language learning and cross-cultural adaptation to a group of young people mentored by them. Shelley was so committed to her work that she took trips out of the city for days and weeks to do evangelistic work. Unfortunately, this caused her to neglect her duty as wife and mother.

I was very concerned for her situation and especially for her marriage. Her husband was becoming unhappy about her absences from home, especially since she had just given birth. She would take her newborn son along on her trips, leaving her husband to take care of the older daughter. I strongly advised her to cut back on her trips and give more attention to her family. And I was glad that she took my advice, because her husband was beginning to show signs of sickness. However, she had to endure heavy criticism from her colleagues for not being as active as before. Their expectations of her were high, and she was not coping well. It was at this time that we would meet often to chat, and for her to unburden herself.

Her husband was later diagnosed with muscular dystrophy (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), and that began their constant trips to big cities to look for cures. Their finances were low, and most of their colleagues were not able to understand their situation or sympathise with her husband's sickness. They would make remarks expressing their non-acceptance of her situation. How she needed someone's

shoulder to cry on! My encouragement to them was that they were right in the centre of God's will, and the sickness was not a punishment. Her duty to her family was of paramount importance at that time. Having done evangelistic work since her teens, it was very difficult for her to take a step back. But my reminder to her was that there are seasons in life when we must find different ways of achieving the same ends: she might not be able to "go", but while she was caring for her husband, God would bring people to her. And our faithful God did just that, and her home continued to be a haven for those young people who returned from their mission fields and needed rest and counsel. She was there for them.

After a few years of lingering deterioration in health, Shelley's husband passed away. His death at 38 years old was a great blow to her and her children. Shelley struggled with trying to run the business that her husband left behind, and continued to give training to the young men who would come from their home provinces to do evangelistic work. It was a tough time, especially when her son was showing signs of emotional insecurity when he was a few years old. He was born when his father's health had started to fail, and received little attention when he needed it most. Later, he was diagnosed with ADHD and dyslexia, which made schooling very challenging for him, and increased his emotional instability. Shelley has had to spend much time with him, and also seek professional help for him.

In spite all the challenges she has to face, Shelley is still very committed to the calling that the Lord had given her, to go and preach the gospel to those who need it. While she is now committed to also bringing up her children, she is actively counselling younger colleagues, especially those called to cross-cultural work. We keep in touch via social media, and I continue to provide the encouragement that she needs.

While it may seem that the blessings of mentoring only go one way, from mentor to mentee, the blessings that I have received from mentoring my younger colleagues far outweigh what I have done for them. We have learnt from each other, and I am the one who has received the greatest benefit. I have learnt that I'm just a strand of

thread in the warp and woof of the lives of my younger friends. As I have been mentored, so I mentor others, that they may also mentor others, and in that way we all grow, to give glory to our Lord.

## Chapter 3

# A Cultural Chameleon



Kathy Snook, one of our centre managers in PNG, said of me: “In many ways she appears to be a chameleon – able to adjust and fit in with any culture in which she finds herself.”

Going to the field in PNG and working among Western missionaries was a double whammy of cultural adaptation to both PNG and Western cultures. I had to navigate the minefields of different cultural landscapes carefully, and avoid cultural missteps which would damage relationships. Fortunately, my colleagues and the PNG people were usually very forgiving of my mistakes.

### **Crossing cultures**

Living in a different culture, one has to negotiate the minefields of different cultural norms and worldviews.

My first lesson was that Western culture was not uniform across different Western countries. I was surprised to learn that English/Australian and American table manners differed. At our field orientation, I learnt that it would be rude to reach across your neighbour at the dining table to get things or food. The proper rule is

to ask, “May I have the butter” or “Please pass the butter. Thank you.” The English would ask “Would you like to have some butter?” The person would take the hint to pass the butter.

I also learned that Americans are shocked that the Australians would mash their peas or beans against their forks before putting that food in their mouths. Conversely, the Australians are amused that Americans would cut their food, then go through the additional step of moving the fork to their right hands to put food in their mouths. These lessons helped me to be more conscious of what to do and not do when invited to Western homes for meals.

Nonetheless, I believe I once committed a social *faux pas* by asking my Canadian hostess for some chilli sauce for my meat. In their culture, such a request might imply that the food was not tasty enough (and hence required a sauce). My request for chilli sauce originated from a habit of having chilli sauce with my meat. My hostess, who was a good friend, did bring some Tabasco sauce for me, but I felt that I had offended her. From then on, I was careful not to ask for any condiments when dining with Westerners.



*Four laughing ladies: Linda, Poh San, Gwen & Joy*

A chameleon for the sake of the Lord's work, I have learnt and adapted to many things through the years. I have made many friends from many nations, and have enjoyed great fellowship with them. I have also grown to appreciate aspects of different cultures, and with wisdom from the Lord, I have tried to adapt to the different cultural requirements as I live among people of different cultures.

### **Breaking racial barriers**

Events in history and racial differences often raise up barriers between peoples and nations. In WBT, we work with colleagues from many nations. Our God who reconciles man to himself also wants broken relationships between people to be healed, and creates opportunities for those who love him to be reconciled to each other.

Once, I was invited to help check the translations for people in Buka Island. Little did I realise that this trip would turn out to be an opportunity for me to break through racial barriers and deeply-held misconceptions about the Chinese.

At the end of the trip, as I was saying goodbye to the team from the Vasui people, one of them shook hands with me, and I found a 20 Kina (S\$7) note in my hand! He had just sold some bags of copra, but that 20 Kina was a big sum of money for them. What a big "thank you" from him. I could not refuse to accept it as refusal would be impolite. Later I mentioned that gift to the team's advisor, and he told me something that surprised me very much.

Years ago, the Chinese traders and shopkeepers were the richest people on Buka Island. Several of them had been impatient and mistreated the local people, which caused much resentment against the Chinese in this region. This built-up resentment and negative feelings towards the Chinese resulted in Chinese shops in the region being looted and destroyed during the civil war.

My presence in the villages gave the local people an opportunity to see another kind of Chinese – one who loves the Lord like they do, and who was among them as an equal – eating their local foods in their homes, and enjoying conversations and laughter with them. They observed that I washed in their streams, and used their outhouses. The



advisor told me that the people had appreciated my presence and work with them, and that man had been showing his appreciation.

That was a great moment for me, but there were other times of disappointment and prejudice which I faced as an Asian woman. Once, when I was teaching the NTC 3 in PNG on translating epistles, one of the course participants was a retired teacher, over 50 years old, who prided himself on knowing the Scriptures and his language well. There were two of us teaching the course: an American colleague taught linguistics in the mornings, and I taught translation in the afternoon. This participant was very impressed by my American colleague, but every afternoon, during the translation course, he would absent himself to go to the clinic for this or that complaint. He was none too impressed by an Asian woman with no doctoral degree. There was nothing that I could do except to accept the situation, and pray that, despite his resistance, he would learn something about translation.

As more and more Asians joined the organisation, we were glad that we had opportunities to work and interact with each other. At an Asian picnic one Saturday afternoon in Ukarumpa, Japanese, Koreans and Singaporeans were gathered, and we all brought our ethnic foods to share. We gathered as co-workers, as Christian brothers and sisters, chatting in small groups, getting to know each other. Barriers were broken, apologies were made. The damaged relationships caused by the Second World War were healed among colleagues due to our relationship in Christ.

This reminded me of my visit to the home of a Japanese colleague and friend's home in Kyushu. Her father had spent the war years as a teacher in Singapore and then in Indonesia. At the first meal in their home, he made a little speech, saying how much he appreciated my visit. It meant a lot to him, that I was willing to be a guest at their home, despite what happened during the war and the Japanese occupation of Southeast Asia. In many ways my visit was part of a healing process for him and his family.

## **Relationships**

Relationships and terms of address show our respect for each other, but can be misunderstood when crossing cultures. The daughter

of one of our Asian colleagues was chided for calling an American colleague “aunty”. “I’m not related to you,” was the rude response. The teenager was taken aback. Our American colleague did not know that in many Asian cultures, “aunty” was a term of respect for an older female. I had to explain to our Western colleagues that Asians sometimes use familial terms to address older persons outside the family to show deference and respect. In fact, it would be rude for a young person to call an older person by name. I hoped that my explanation would help them see how important relationships are in Asian societies, not only within families, but also within the community.

When Liisa and I moved to live among the Mauwake villagers, relationships opened doors for us. We were adopted by Magidar, the village headman’s younger brother, and as his daughters, were accepted into the clan. The people from all the Mauwake villages became our relatives. So, whenever we visited a village, we would be introduced to our uncles, fathers, mothers, aunts, cousins, brothers and sisters. And since we were related, we could easily talk with them about our work. We also could request for help for checking our translations. In the Mauwake and surrounding region, we were fondly referred to as “those two”, and everyone knew who we were. They hardly ever called us by our names. As an Asian, I was accustomed to this web of family relationships – Liisa would be amazed when, after visiting a village, I could remember how a certain person was related to our adoptive family.

### **Culture and Bible translation**

Despite all the challenges faced in translating the Bible, we know and are thankful that the Lord has prepared in all cultures some elements that will direct the people to himself. Hidden in every language and culture are words or elements that are powerful metaphors to clearly teach about God’s love or his relationship with man. We can adapt those elements in their culture to appropriately and meaningfully present the gospel to them, and change their worldview. It also subtly shows them that Christianity is not a foreign religion, and God is not a foreign God. For example, most worldviews contain the concept of a powerful being or spirit who created and owned the world.

The Mauwake people have an expression *era sererkiya* (road, clear the grass), meaning “make a clear path to...”. This is used when people want to re-establish relationship with a distant relative or a former trading partner, or to be reconciled. The person will prepare a pig or two, clay pots and wooden bowls, and other gifts, and on a given day will go with his clan members to the other person’s village. That way, the relationship is re-established and strengthened. This was a very apt picture for us to use when talking about our relationship with God, and how God himself made that act of reconciliation with us. We often used this to present the view that God took the initiative to send Jesus as the sacrifice (like the pig and the gifts) to open the road for us to re-establish that relationship with God. God himself *era sererekak* so that the road is now clear for us to go to God, and be reconciled to him. A beautiful picture that the people could understand very well.

The Mauwake also have a lovely ritual to heal sickness and relationship. It is their belief that broken relationships lead to sicknesses, caused by the ill will of someone whom one might have offended. When a person has a serious illness, and medicines had not resulted in a cure, the family would set a day for the ritual to be held. Relatives and trade partners from near and far would be invited to be present. Two cups of water would be prepared; one containing some twigs still bearing some leaves, and placed next to the sick person; the other cup would be handed round to the men and women seated in a circle. As each person received the cup, he/she would speak into the cup. If the person had a grudge against that sick person, he/she would speak into the water which was believed to cancel that grudge or unhappiness. A person who had nothing against the sick would say, “I have nothing against him/her. May he be well.” Once the cup had been passed to the last person, the water would be thrown out, indicating that the grudges have been thrown away. Then an elder of the clan would enter the room and take up the other cup of water, and sprinkle water on the sick person with the leaves. All present would then be invited to a simple meal.

The analogy of water in the healing of relationship and body could help lead people to think of baptism, when our sins are washed away and remembered no more by God, so the person can be reconciled to him.

The concept of “forgiveness” is not a common one to many peoples in PNG, to whom vengeance is a deep-rooted social obligation. So, many translation teams struggle to handle the translation of “forgiveness”. In many cases there is no one-to-one translation for this concept.

The Mauwake term for forgiveness is *pina iirariya*, which is “remove (his) heavy/sin”, and when a person has been forgiven, the term is *opora marew* “no more talk”. So, to portray the concept of forgiveness, they will say, “*pina war iirareya opora marew*”, meaning “he has been forgiven and there will be no more accusations against him”, or “he has been completely forgiven”.

Another team translating into another PNG language struggled for many years to find the right term for “forgiveness”. It was when they were almost at the completion of their translation of the New Testament that they found the most appropriate cultural term. It was Christmas Eve, and the whole village gathered in the centre of the village, and while in a circle, each person put his or her arms on the shoulders of the person on either side of them. The translator asked them the reason for this action. “This is how we say that whatever someone has done wrong to us, we put our arms on their shoulders to show that we will forget that.” So “God puts an arm on someone’s shoulder” in that language means that God has forgiven that person.

The concept of “love” is another term that is hard to translate. Often, languages have a term called “love”, but it is usually the love of parents for their children, not love between adults. The Mauwake word *kookaliya* “he likes”, is close, but not close enough to “love”. In our search, we finally used the term *kemaliya*, derived from the word *kema* “liver”. In Mauwake culture, all emotions emanate from the liver, for example,

enthusiastic	<i>kema iriya</i> (liver goes up)
terrified	<i>kema puep iwak</i> (liver split went in)
thirsty	<i>kema enekariya</i> (liver on fire)
think/consider	<i>kema suuwiya</i> (liver push)
forget	<i>kema irinariya</i> (liver stuck)

Since *kema* (seat of emotion) + verb suffix *liya* denotes a strong feeling for a person, the closest equivalent to “love” we found was the term *kemaliya*.

### **The language of love**

Are being linguistically gifted and knowing the language well the main prerequisites for missions and cross-cultural work? Definitely not! Those people with linguistic challenges can be as gifted for cross-cultural work as others. I have spoken to people who felt that they would have difficulty learning a new language, and so considered themselves unfit for cross-cultural missions work. My encouragement to them was to give themselves the chance to try. Learning another language is really a matter of being persistent, seeking a language environment to practise in, and putting effort into it. It is also a long-term process.

Liisa and I could speak the language well, which impressed people. It also showed them that we respected them enough to learn their language well. That way, we built bridges between us and the people. However, there is a language that speaks better and stronger, and will not only bridge the gap between people, but will reach their inner beings.

Shin is a fellow Asian, who with her husband, was working in a village in the south of PNG. I was in their village for a week to check some chapters of Luke for them. As I walked around the village, the people told me, in mirth, that Shin “murders” their language, as well as English. But they have accepted her into their community. Why? Because she has won them over with her love. Shin herself knew she got the grammar all wrong, but she was too busy serving the needs of the villagers with her medical skills to pay attention to grammar.

So, while good linguistic skills are a plus for those of us who do language work, relating well with the people and showing lovingkindness will overcome any language barrier. So, while I’m thankful for the gift for languages, I have also aimed to show kindness and empathy for people. The apostle Paul said, “without love, we are nothing.” The greatest language is the language of love. And it is the language of our Lord and Saviour. It reaches the hearts of people, and

is much more powerful than any sermon preached in the most fluent language.

### **Serving the people**

*But to you who are listening I say... Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back... if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. (Luke 6:27-33)*

I always dread reading the teachings of Jesus in Luke 6. There are so many things that I cannot do or achieve. And the hardest of these is to love.

Living 24/7 for several months at a time in Moro village among the Mauwake people, we were scrutinised and talked about. Whatever we did was observed and shared among the people. Except for our bedrooms and our bathroom cum toilet which were surrounded by seven-foot-high walls and some other internal walls, our house, at the edge of the village, was a see-through house. To allow a good breeze through the house, the external walls of the rest of the house were only three feet high with wire mesh up to the roof. The wire mesh let the wind in and kept the mosquitoes out, but it could not stop people observing us. Those standing nearby could see everything that we were doing. In the later years we had a bit more privacy as algae built up on the wire mesh. Besides being observed all the time, we stood out like sore thumbs.

Among the Mauwake people, I always felt that I was the most selfish person among them. Sometimes when some people came to ask for some tea or sugar, or a tin of fish, I would give grudgingly. The people knew that we would always have the things they needed, especially tinned fish, so they knew that we gave out of our plenty. On the one hand, I knew that I ought to show love and hospitality, but in my selfish heart, it was like cutting out a slice of my flesh. Sometimes, in one day, we would have several requests. It was like being a village store, but the goods were not bought with money, more like through unequal barter. The people did not see that as unfair – after all, hadn't they accepted us, protected us, and given us the produce from their gardens?

We were very happy to give to some, but to others, we gave grudgingly. The latter group were those we felt were trying to take advantage of us. For example, they would come for a tin of fish, and a few days later return us a hand of bananas. That was obviously not a fair exchange. Whatever it was, I always felt that I had not shown enough love; after all, the Lord taught us in Luke 6 to love even our enemies. And these were our friends and neighbours, and in many ways, their sharing and generosity to each other much exceeded mine. So, there was that constant feeling of guilt, of being loveless and unchristian, compared to the people. How could I be called a child of God when I was selfish and unforgiving? Asking forgiveness from our heavenly Father was my constant prayer, and my struggle was real.

Magidar, the man who adopted us into the village of Moro, was a great help to us. As our village father, he loaned us the use of his newly built house when we first went to live in the village, and he initiated our house-building and organised his relatives to help us. Through his connections and relationships, we were able to get the timber for our house. Also due to his relationship with many villages, many people in those villages welcomed us as relatives. However, his expectations that we would assist him in setting up a business did not come to pass, and he would often hint at that disappointment. We got on well with his children, and his sons often helped us with house repairs. His eldest daughter, Wadayak, often helped us with housework, and was one of our earliest literacy workers. We supported her financially in her studies at a Bible college, and she is now working with a local church.

### **Restoring relationships**

On the morning we left the village for last time in 2001, Magidar came to us with a freshly picked pineapple, his parting gift to us. He was teary, and said to us, "You understood our culture." What did he mean?

The Mauwake people, and indeed most PNGeans, believe that broken relationships bring sickness and death. So, broken relationships are quickly patched up as soon as they can find the funds to make a feast.

At one time, we had been away for several months, and when we

returned to the village, we were told that, one day, Magidar had been angrily hitting his wife when his daughter, Wadayak, intervened, and in the tussle, his sarong loosened, and fell. Feeling greatly shamed by Wadayak, Magidar left the village and went to stay with his eldest son who lived nearby. He would not return till his “face” was restored. The custom of the people is that if something wrong has been done towards a father, it is the duty of the maternal uncles to bring about a reconciliation and admonish the person. None of Magidar’s brothers-in-law were willing to do that as they did not approve of his behaviour, especially his frequent beating of his wife. Moreover, they would find it hard to pay for a reconciliation feast. Meanwhile, Magidar was telling relatives in several villages that he wanted to go home, but could not without losing face. A stalemate.

This broken relationship weighed heavily on Wadayak. As long as her father stayed away from the village, the blame would be heavy on her. We discussed the matter and assured her that we would help her pay for the food for the feast. A day was announced. Most of the villagers helped cook the food, and we contributed meat and rice for the occasion. In the afternoon, Magidar, accompanied by a small entourage, entered the village, face restored. Wadayak shook hands with her father, holding a bunch of betelnuts as the reconciliation gift. The maternal uncles also went through the necessary rituals of shaking hands with him, and then lectured Wadayak and the rest of the young people about respect for elders.

Everyone was relieved. Relationship had been restored. Besides Magidar’s restoration of face, the maternal uncles’ status was also given a boost as they performed the necessary teaching ritual. Magidar knew that we had initiated the reconciliation feast and was thankful to us, hence his little farewell speech to us the morning we left. Our gesture had spoken deeply to him.

### **Being part of the community**

Our front room became a sort of dispensary. People would come at all times of the day for medicines or to have their sores cleaned and tended. And we would clean the sores so well that they healed quickly, so our “reputation” spread, and we had to take more time off from our



translation work to clean sores. It came to a point that we had to restrict the times we would be available to do that. Except for serious cuts and new burns, our dispensary would only “open” before nine in the mornings or after dinner. People were appreciative of our cleaning their sores, but in my heart, I was doing so grudgingly, and I felt ugly inside.

We tried to be part of the village community. Whether a house-building, wedding or funeral, the whole village would contribute cooked food for the day, so we would make our contribution as well, and join in the activities. That way, we built a relationship with every family in the village. Neighbours would show their appreciation by giving us plates of food contributed by others.

Before I left for the field, two of my beloved teachers from SBC had said to me, “God has given you the most difficult missionary task.” At that time, I did not have time nor inclination to ponder over what they had said to me. But through the years, I’ve often pondered over what constituted the “difficulties”. Lack of modern facilities, like electricity, running water, convenient transport, convenient communication? Or constant mosquito bites and malaria? Or the hard work of translation, struggling to find the best ways to convey the meaning of God’s Word? Relating to colleagues? On reflection, the hardest thing I experienced was the constant struggle against myself, accusing myself of the lack of love. I could not love the people as the Lord commanded me to love them, despite the fact that the people appreciated what we were doing with and for them.

Through all those struggles, I kept trusting our Lord’s grace, that He would continue to love me and let me serve Him despite my failings.

### **Learning culture**

During our orientation course, we were instructed on the local PNG customs, and the taboos to avoid. We learnt that there are some PNG-wide customs, and some tribe-specific ones. As in any culture, we foreigners would have to learn these so as not to embarrass anyone or to cause offence. Here are some of the customs I learnt about while in both fields of service.

We learnt that it is extremely offensive for a person to point a finger at someone in PNG. It is akin to cursing someone. So how do people indicate a direction of an object? The correct way is to point with your lower lip – push your lower lip out and tilt your mouth in that direction. Once, when we were at a highlands “singsing”, a festival of tribal dances and competitions, I wanted to tell Liisa to look at an interesting tribal costume. In my excitement, I pointed in their direction, with my face to Liisa. And when I turned around, a local man had walked right into the space that I had been pointing to. He stood there and glared at me, mumbling angrily. At that moment, I remembered the PNG taboo. If I had been a local person, I would surely have gotten a beating, or been pressed to pay “compensation” for cursing him.

“Have you seen....?” would be natural question in many cultures if one is searching for an object. However, this question is a no-no in PNG. Once, I was looking for our coconut scraper which I had left at the back door of our house. I asked our gardener who was there, “Have you seen the coconut scraper?” His reply was “No,” and he walked away. Later, he complained to Liisa that I had accused him of stealing that coconut scraper. Prefacing a question with those three seemingly innocent words was considered an accusation in PNG culture. I had forgotten that custom, and had hurt him. So, the next week when he turned up for work, I went to apologise to him, explaining that I had no intention of accusing him of theft.

We were also taught not to admire or express interest in any item that someone was wearing or using. In PNG culture, an expression of such interest is an indication that you want that object or one similar to it. One day, in the village, I saw a neighbour wearing a lovely bracelet of beads of different colours. Without thinking, I held her hand and said how interesting and lovely that bracelet was. To my embarrassment, the next day she came to our house with a similar bracelet as a gift for me. I had forgotten about that rule!

In the same vein, if we gave a blouse or shirt to someone in the village, we could half expect to see someone else wearing that piece of clothing. The custom of giving away things to someone who admired it means that things are passed around and shared.

Among the Mauwake people, going to someone who has just brought home some meat or fish from hunting or fishing is really impolite. This action indicates that one is coming for a share of the meat. In the early days, when I was anxious to record the various cultural happenings to learn about the people, I was informed that Saror had returned to the village with a pig. I quickly went to look for him, with a notebook in hand, to ask him questions about the pig hunt that day and to learn more vocabulary. I noticed later that he was rather embarrassed. Why? Because the pig he had brought back was a little one, and there would not have been enough of it to be shared with everyone. My being there obligated him to give us part of the meat. In later years, after being immersed longer in PNG culture, I realised that I had really committed a cultural *faux pas*.

Another time, a neighbour borrowed an axe from us, and did not return it for some time. One day I went to get it back, wanting to cut some branches off a tree near our house. The family was rather reluctant to hand it over, but I was insistent, thinking that they were trying to take advantage of us. Later I learnt that the son had cut himself with the axe when he was using it. In their culture, when a tool has cut someone, it should not be used until the wound on that person heals. If the tool is used while the sore is still unhealed, the sore will remain unhealed for a long time. If only I had been told of that cultural belief before I went to ask for the tool! No wonder the family was reluctant to return the axe to us. After that, we learnt that when loaning any tool to anyone, we had better pray hard that the person would not hurt himself/herself while using that tool.

Besides that, there is another belief that if the person has any misfortune with a borrowed tool, it is due to the owner's reluctance to loan that tool to him. This cultural belief was confirmed to us by this account from Magidar. He had once borrowed a gun from Matuwina for hunting pigs. He saw some among the tall grass and shot at them, but he missed every shot and came home empty-handed. As he was usually a good marksman, he blamed Matuwina, saying that his unwillingness to loan the gun to him had somehow put a hex on his pig hunting.

The biggest sin to the Mauwake people is inhospitality and selfishness. Sharing and giving to those who ask is an obligation among the people. Their most highly-prized virtue is hospitality, no matter how little they have.

One evening, we strolled over to Saror's home for a chat around the evening fire, and in our conversation, Kedem, his wife, told us that one of her clan brothers had destroyed half her food garden, pulling out her taros and chopping off the tops of some of her corn. I asked, "Why?"

"He was angry with me."

"For what reason?"

"A few days ago, he came to visit me. Although I greeted him, I did not give him any food. He went home, feeling very offended."

"Will he have to compensate you?"

"No, he has the right to do that."

On seeing our incredulous looks, she explained that it is quite acceptable among them to mess up the food gardens, or something else, of those whom one is displeased with. Once that anger has been expressed, there will be "no talk", meaning that both the offence and the anger will not be mentioned again. Life goes on as before.

I thought of all the times that villagers had come to our house for chats, and sometimes in our busyness we neglected to offer even a cup of water. We had no food garden for them to destroy. However, someone once pushed over the bucket of water that we had put out to heat in the sun. No pig nor dog would have been strong enough to do that. Who had we offended? We had no idea.

Once, I received a much-deserved rebuke from the leader of a Mauwake village for causing him shame. In the Mauwake villages, the villagers would normally serve fish or meat to visitors even if they could barely afford to. In their culture, such a gesture honoured the guests and represented the hospitality of the village. In this particular instance, a colleague, Keiko, and I had travelled to Yeipamer to conduct a survey. Knowing the time-honoured practice of showing hospitality among the Mauwake, I brought along a few cans of fish and meat, together with bags of rice. I handed two cans to the leader of the village

for the first two days. That way, he would avoid being shamed for not putting meat in the bowls of staple served to us. On the third day (which was the day of our departure), the leader came to me in the morning and told me quietly that they had cooked rice for us, but did not have meat. I replied that I still had a small can of meat, and he nodded and went away. Soon he returned with two plates rice. Wanting to save the can of meat for lunch, I served the rice to Keiko. Soon the leader returned and he was furious when he saw just plain white rice on our plates.

“Didn’t you say you have a can of meat? Why didn’t you put it on the rice?”

“It’s OK, we can eat plain rice.”

“I’m not thinking about you. You have become one of us. Your friend is a guest, and you have shamed me by serving her plain rice,” he retorted.

What a rebuke! I quickly went to my bag, took out the can of meat, and put some of it on Keiko’s plate. That leader went away satisfied.

I committed another cultural *faux pas* when scraping coconut. In the village, people sit on a stool, equipped with a scraper at the end. When the women scrape coconut they sit sideways, but when the men do it, they sit astride the stool. I never asked the reason for the difference, presuming that that was just preference, or that being modest, women would not sit astride the stool. One day, tired of sitting sideways to scrape coconut, I sat astride the stool. One woman came to me, and told me not to do that, without explaining why. I was puzzled. Many years later, while discussing foods and taboos, my neighbours explained that women are very careful not to step over foodstuff, believing that such an action would adversely affect the health of their menfolk. That solved the mystery about why women did not sit astride a stool when scraping coconut as that would necessarily involve a woman stepping over foodstuff. This one episode made me wonder how many more cultural “sins” I had committed.

Living among the Mauwake people taught us lessons about navigating cultural minefields, and the need to have an understanding of any underlying tensions. We sometimes had to learn things the hard way.

We thought we had come up with a wonderful idea! We suggested planting 100 hybrid coconut seedlings on people's land. The plan was that, in a few years, we would collect the coconuts, make copra and sell it to raise funds for literacy projects among the Mauwake people. When the project ended, the coconut trees would belong to the owners of the land. I had discussed the project with our village father and a few elders of the village, and they agreed that this was a good idea. And so, the 100 seedlings were ordered, and a few young men helped to plant them on plots of land adjacent to each other.



*Woman scraping coconut*

After five years, the coconuts were ready for harvesting. Everyone volunteered to help collect the nuts, process them into copra, and then bag it for sale. It looked like a successful project that would bring the people together. However, soon we heard disturbing news. We were made aware that the plots of land were under dispute among several families, and ownership was unclear as cousins, adopted sons and natural sons all vied for ownership. What a mess. So instead of bringing people together, our project was bringing latent tensions to the fore.

We also learnt that traditional land ownership was communal as clans rotated their farming from plot to plot. Land was not individually owned, and brothers shared the work and the produce. However, with the introduction of cash crops like coconuts and cocoa, plots of land became less free for sharing. As the population increased, members of the clans jostled for ownership of land. We had failed to be aware of the underlying tensions. Members within the clan were also accusing our village father of using us and the project to unjustifiably claim the land the coconut trees had been planted on. What I had thought was a good idea and a blessing in fact turned out to be a flashpoint of

contention among several families. May the Lord forgive me, and may his love help the people to forgive each other, and to share freely.

As ignorant foreigners, we were often forgiven for our mistakes, and sometimes had matters explained to us. But not always. Hence, treading through the minefield of cultural norms did place some stress on us. We learnt to listen rather than talk, watch and observe rather than take things for granted. In village meetings which were held at least once a week, people would say, "Hey, you two, say something. Why are you sitting there so quietly?" And we would say, "We are listening and learning."

In my second field of work, I recall a funny episode. Joy and I were involved in regular visits to villages to provide training to translation teams, and to be their consultants. On the way to a village, an accident occurred ahead of us and caused a massive traffic jam. After a long delay, we reached the foot of the hill at 7.30 pm, then endured a back-breaking ride up the hill on a tractor, and finally arrived in the village at 9 pm. After a quick dinner, the hosts brought in basins of water for us to wash up. I quickly dipped my towel in my basin and washed my face (which was hot and dusty). At that moment, the oldest man in the group remarked, "She's washing her face with the water in a foot-washing basin!" I was too embarrassed to look up. It is the custom of the people to first wash their feet, which they feel would be smelly after a whole day in shoes. But I had been more anxious to clean my face! My action might have caused them to feel that they were derelict in their hospitality by not providing us water in another basin for washing our faces. In their concern for us, they all stood in a line to watch us get into bed! I had to do so in my dusty, travel clothes. Oh, for some privacy!

Navigating through different cultures calls for wisdom and grace. I believe that much grace has been shown to me, when I unknowingly stepped on people's toes, embarrassed them, broke their cultural norms, and when my actions appeared to be crass to my hosts.

## Chapter 4

### Adopt, Adapt, Adjust



Living in a village 80 miles from the main town of Madang, along the northern coast of PNG, we would jokingly say that we were living a million-dollar location, a tropical paradise. The ocean was almost at our doorstep, with coconut and palm trees, and the fresh air of the outdoors. The reef teemed with thriving corals and beautiful coloured fish of various kinds. However, we were living like the local people, without the advantage of modern conveniences, without electricity



*Our village house with radio antenna, solar panel and header tank*



and, before we had our house built, water was fetched from a pump a short distance away from the village.

Our house was big, being our living quarters as well as our offices. The posts were of the strongest timber in the region – ironwood and sea-washed trunks that had stood many years. The floor was also of ironwood planks, the only sawn timber in the house. The house studs, to which our external and internal walls were attached, were of three-inch diameter untreated timber. The external walls were made of branches of the sago palm, light and porous, and impervious to insects! We had to replace the external walls twice in the course of 24 years. Except for the bedroom walls which went up to seven feet, the external walls of the rest of the house were only three feet high, with flywire up to the roof. That was to allow as much air and breeze (if any) as possible to move through the house in that tropical heat. Internal walls were woven from strips of the skin of sago branches.



*Inside our house*

The joists on which the floor of the house sat were of ordinary timber, and although they were treated with insect repellent, wood borers would bore their way in. Their telltale signal was the zzzzzz in the wood as they chewed through the wood. For the first few years of our

stay in Moro, we would frequently go round the house to check the posts, joists and studs for any white ants and wood borers that would bore long tunnels through the timber, and eventually cause rotting. Our weapons were big syringes filled with insect killer that we pumped into the tell-tale holes in the wood. The poor insects would die, buried in the timber, but our house would be safe.

A 2,000-gallon tank stood at the back of the house. Rainwater running down the metal roof of our house would collect in that tank. The water would be pumped up to a header tank on top of the roof, so we could have running water in the house. In the evening, while one of us did the dinner, the other would be pumping water from the big tank to the header tank on the roof – 400 pumps to fill up the empty tank. While colleagues fitted electric pumps powered by solar batteries, we decided to stick to the hand pump so that we would do our daily exercises while replenishing our header tank! During the wet season, our neighbours were welcome to get their drinking water from our big tank.

How did we have warm showers? (We preferred that in spite of the tropical heat.) Our hot water system was very simple. Every morning we would place a black bucket filled with water outside the house, and by evening, on sunny days, the water would be hot enough for showers and washing up the dishes. How did we have warm showers when the warm water was not from the tap? Well, we had a bucket with a hole to which was fitted a specially made shower rose, with a twist control to turn the water on or



*Bucket shower*

off. We would fill up the bucket with warm water and then hoist it up with a pulley above us. Hey presto! Warm showers!

One modern convenience and luxury we had was a kerosene fridge. It was a used fridge bought from one of the older missionaries who had returned home. A lighted wick at the bottom of the fridge, fueled by a tank of kerosene, produced the heat needed to cause the refrigerant to cool the fridge. Keeping the fridge running took much work as the wick had to be trimmed weekly, and the tank filled. Arriving back in the village after being away for weeks or months, usually after dark, our first task would be to light the wick of the fridge. Once, it took us from 7 pm to 12 midnight to solve the problem of the wick not lighting. Finally, we found that the rust in the tank had contaminated the kerosene! The fridge served us well for a number of years. However, when the manufacturer no longer produced the wicks we needed, and our kerosene tank had become rusted beyond repair, we had to give it up and replace it with one that ran on LP gas. No more dealing with tanks of kerosene or trimming of wicks!

### **God-given friendships**

Friends and friendships are God-given. I believe that at every stage of our lives, God will provide friends along the way. Friends can comfort us, and share our joys and woes. Through our friendships and every encounter, we learn from each other. Even negative experiences can teach us deep lessons.

Some friends are with us for years and years, and some are for short periods. Whatever the length of time, they are woven into the tapestry of our lives. I believe that God brings them into our lives to add more hues and vibrancy to our lives, enriching our lives. And I appreciate each one of them, and treasure those memories.

This poem was written on my birthday, 2005, when friends from Hongkong, Thailand and China gathered with me to enjoy Korean BBQ.

*Friends around a table sat  
with sizzling meat and friendly chats,  
dear ones to me in special ways,  
strands of thread enriching life's way.*

*Wherever, yet the threads do tie,  
so friends who happen to come by  
to fellowship and laugh and share,  
carrying each other's needs and cares.*

*Strands of gold, blue and every hue,  
Warp and woof, life's patterns sewn....  
Each one holds a special spot  
in the tapestry of my life and lot.*

*Friends meet and yet do part,  
but the strands hold strong at heart,  
until further in the lanes of life  
to gladly meet, and then "good-bye".*

*Criss-crossed strands, each does lend  
strength to others, like linked hands.  
Mixed, enriched by the Father's love,  
Woven tight by the Master hand above.*

### **Liisa – friend, teammate and housemate**

My best friendship, without doubt, is with Liisa. We were partners in ministry, but more so, we were friends. During our shared life together in PNG for 24 years, we had our ups and downs, we cried together and laughed together. We looked after each other in sickness, and rejoiced together when good things happened. We agreed and disagreed. And when we came up with the same idea, we would laugh and say, "Great minds think alike, and fools do not differ." Liisa, with her typical Finnish frankness, would keep me in line, and tell me off for anything that she felt was not right.

A Chinese saying goes like this: "相处好，同住难" meaning: it's easy to be friends, but not easy to live together. And it is even harder to live together in Christian love as missionaries.

Missionaries are looked up to as spiritual giants. And people think that they have overcome all problems, and live great lives. In reality, we

are just as human as any other person. Some come from good homes, some from broken homes and dysfunctional families. All those growing-up pains and hurts, some submerged through the years, can surface in ways that sometimes throw the person off balance. The challenges of living in different cultures, outside one's comfort zone, relating with people of different cultures and worldviews, often cause the submerged trauma be brought to the surface, and may cause distress.

Both Liisa and I had our share of experiences with somewhat dysfunctional families. So, on top of cultural differences between us, we also had to deal with the hurts and insecurities from our upbringing.

In the early days, when Liisa took her afternoon nap, I would go out to chat with the women in the village. One day, when I returned, Liisa looked rather unhappy. I had no clue as to why until she told me about herself. On waking up, when she could not find me in the house, she panicked. This arose out of her childhood experience – family issues had caused Liisa to feel this fear whenever her mother did not arrive home at an expected time. My absence from the house when she woke up from her nap generated that same fear. Her explanation made me more aware of her needs. And so I agreed that I would write a note for her whenever I went out of the house during her nap.

Through the four years together of our first term on the field, we had some disagreements that we felt arose out of a combination of our own insecurities and worldviews, as well as cultural differences. We didn't have quarrels or violent disagreements, but might have negative reactions to minor incidents. So, as issues arose, we were led to look deeper into ourselves, find the causes of our inadequacies, and to understand ourselves and each other better.

For example, I was hurt when Liisa spent more time with another friend rather than with me. I felt rather neglected. "I've not felt like this before. Why now?" I asked myself. On examining myself, I found the reason. Being quite alone, as an Asian among mainly Westerners and PNGeans, and without the familiar surroundings and friends in Singapore, I was emotionally dependent upon Liisa. And so that insignificant incident became a big issue for me. There was a need to be realistic and less dependent on her.

Liisa had shared about the counselling she received while in England, prior to coming to PNG. I felt that it would be beneficial for me to have some counselling sessions myself. So, on my first furlough, although I didn't go to a trained counsellor, I sought older and wiser persons, and shared my experiences and challenges with them. And from them I received sound advice. During my second term on the field, I began to feel more strongly that I needed to be in control of my emotions, and to discover the underlying issues of some of my feelings. On my second furlough, I had several sessions with a competent counsellor who had himself been a missionary. I was so glad for those sessions that enabled me to understand myself and clean out some cobwebs in my life. And although I still struggled with the same issues every now and then, I could nail the cause and deal with those emotions. In fact, on the recommendation of our Wycliffe administration, I had a few sessions with a counsellor during every furlough. Those sessions, in which we discussed personal issues, interpersonal relationships, fears and hurts, enabled me to deal with long-suppressed matters in my life.

On the whole, Liisa and I got along well. That was mainly because we were quite alike in nature, and she is much more in control of herself. We did have our misunderstandings and differences, but fortunately, few major differences between us. We learnt early in our relationship to deal with differences and to forgive quickly. If one of us showed unhappiness, the other would ask for the cause rather than wait for that person to reveal it. Most days we ended our days by praying together, and would share our feelings then.

Liisa is a phlegmatic person, and tends to be calmer in her dealings with situations. I could be easily agitated sometimes. One day, I returned to the house, fuming at something, and she tried to calm me down. One of her favourite phrases was, "On the other hand...", and I would usually be pacified. But that day, I was really angry, and I forestalled her by saying, "I don't want your 'on the other hand', I just want to be angry!" I just needed to let off steam. So she wisely left me alone.

We came from different culinary backgrounds. I love noodles, and in the early days in PNG, there was only spaghetti available. When instant noodles finally appeared in the stores I was delighted!

Sometimes, though, I overdid it, and served noodles for lunch two days in a row (we took turns, each cooking two days in a row). That did not go down well with Liisa, and one day, she made a remark to that effect. I was little hurt, and later in the day pointed out to her that both noodles and bread were from wheat, and I had never begrudged having bread three times a day. She saw the point, and did not say anything more, and I on my part made sure that I did not overdo it. If I needed a “shot” of noodles, I would have some for supper at 9.30 pm, mixed with sesame oil and soya sauce. Yummy!

One year, we went shopping in Madang town. Christmas was in the air, and I saw a little tree stand ideal for hanging the increasing number of cups in our kitchen. I put it in the shopping cart. Then, as I went along the aisle, I recalled Liisa and I discussing how it was getting more and more difficult for us to pack up the village house before we left each time. We had accumulated many things over the years, and everything had to be packed away to protect them from the mice and lizards that would overrun the place in our absence. Buying one more item meant one more thing to be stored away, and would cause more stress. I was not sure if Liisa would want another object to take care of. And so, I put it back on the shelf. Much as I liked it, I would rather not let it be the cause of friction between us.

That year, our Christmas Eve get-together was with Jean and Linda, Jean’s teammate at the time, our colleagues from five miles up the road. They drove to our village, and brought Christmas goodies and presents. After dinner, we exchanged presents. Linda’s present for us was wrapped in a funny way, and she said, “I saw this in the store the other day, and thought it would make a great present for you two.” It was the cup-hanging tree that I put back on the shelf! Well, God knew that I had liked it, and he was saying that it was all right for us to have it. By giving it to us through Linda, Liisa could not refuse the present; in fact, she liked it. What a surprise, and what a good way to solve our cup storage issue.

After the dedication of the Mauwake New Testament in 1999, and after life together as teammates, Liisa and I parted ways. I was called to help with the work in an Asian country. A few months after I left

PNG, Liisa also went home to Finland, and in a Bible study group, she met someone who loves her! She is now happily married with a “permanent partner”. Together, they returned to PNG to serve for a few more years, and are now retired. How the Lord provided for each of us.

This is a poem I wrote of Liisa:

*“A friend in need, is a friend indeed”,*

*So a friend I have to Liisa been.*

*Steady as a rock is she,*

*strong shoulders she’d offered me*

*to let loose my sighs and moans*

*and banished soon my blues.*

*“On the other hand” she’d often said,*

*when I was grumbling about this or that.*

*Softly spoken, those well-marked words,*

*stopped me short in my furious stews.*

*She wondered how she could a partner be*

*to one of a race famed as busy bees.*

*But then, if the truth be known,*

*a busy bee she’s more to be*

*than the one she thought in truth to be.*

*A good linguist, she knows her stuff*

*and lends her skills, and that’s no bluff.*

*The colleagues know her worth in that,*

*And so with her they talk syntax.*

*Mauwake, she knew well of “ke” and “ko”,*

*and so made the translations flow.*



*Ah sauna, it soothes, she pleads,  
the sizzling steam your body heats;  
relaxes the muscles and the bones  
banishes all our aches and groans.  
So walked I in to the misty steam  
And found the truly Finnish dream.*

*If I'm the left hand, she's the right,  
and in truth the Lord has fitted us tight.  
A score of years we'd remained a pair,  
yet remained ourselves, thus each other bear.  
And yet our Lord in his mercy showed  
The pair of us he so does love.*

*I know her well,  
A saint she be,  
And more,  
a true friend she's proved to be.*

### **Other colleagues and friends**

Liisa and I owe gratitude to the many people who helped us along the way in our work in PNG. We remember the succession of centre managers and their families who ran our regional centre in Madang town which was where we transited often between Ukarumpa and Moro village. The managers were such a blessing to us. Without their help and support, our lives in the village would have been more difficult. They helped us purchase essential things and sent them to us on the trucks that regularly travelled back and forth between Moro and Madang, so we didn't need to travel as often to town to buy supplies and were able to spend more time with the people and on the work. We got on very well with most of the managers. And to show how much we appreciated their support and help, we would often take them out for meals. We have kept in touch with several of them.

I thank God for a long list of colleagues who have become good friends. Bob and Shirley Litteral were not only friends, but also role

models for us. They were very humble, and very caring. After translating the NT for a people group, they went on to be literacy consultants. And even after Shirley had Alzheimer's disease, they continued to serve. I also thank God for Nancy Costello, who came to PNG in 1975 after she had to leave a Southeast Asian country. There she served as our consultant coordinator, meanwhile longing to return to the people she had served in that country. Liisa and I looked up to these role models, and we were so happy for Nancy when she could make contact with some of the people from that Asian country later.

At Ukarumpa, our centre, there was a so-called "Finn House" which was built with funds from the Finnish Missionary Society for Liisa and other Finnish single women. It was a tiny house with four bedrooms upstairs, so four persons could stay there. As Liisa's co-worker, I could rent a room there whenever we went to Ukarumpa for workshops or other work.

Living together with others in that tiny house, having to share our meals, and to work out cooking and washing up arrangements, we needed to learn to live together and accept each other. Frankly, it was not easy for me. We were all so different, from various backgrounds. We had different habits, and needed to adjust to each other's likes and dislikes. Just a couple of stories:

Another colleague was staying with us. After a few days, I noticed that the handles of the cutlery were still greasy after the washing up. So, one day, on the pretext of chatting with her, I watched how she did the dishes. The crockery was well washed. She had put all the cutlery in the wash basin before the dishes were washed. At the end she just picked up the cutlery and stuck them in the cutlery holder without washing them. She presumed that being in the basin, they would be well washed. No wonder the handles were still greasy.

Another colleague had problems sleeping, and the slightest noise or movement in the house would keep her awake. She was an early sleeper, and I, on the other hand, was a late one. Our rooms were separated by only a thin wall. Initially, I was not aware of her problems until she asked Liisa to relay them to me. From then on, I tried my very best to minimise my movement in the room after 9 pm, and would

cushion all the furniture to keep any noise down. But the two-storey house would sway with every movement, and however little I moved, every movement would affect her. So, she finally decided to have a single-storey house built on the next plot of land, and lived alone there. That solved the problem for her and us.

### **Shared laughter**

Jean and Eunice, Jean's teammate of many years, were good friends who worked about five miles from our village, among the Mala people. They owned a vehicle and would give us lifts to town on shopping trips. Many were the meals we shared either at their village or ours, or in a lovely hotel restaurant in town. We had lots of laughter together and would help each other out.

Once, Jean and Eunice returned to the village after having been away for several months. We volunteered to go with them to their village to help clean up their house. Eunice entered her bedroom, and then her scream brought us running. We saw her bolt from the room, very distressed. Rushing in, we saw the cause of that scream. Right in the middle of her mattress was a nest of seven newborn mice. Eunice had a phobia of furry animals such as cats and little creatures, so seeing that was a real trauma for her. Without any hesitation, Liisa and I lifted the offending mattress, took it to the beach, and threw it and the "squatters" out to the sea. A friend in need is a friend indeed!

In the first few years, prior to our owning a kerosene refrigerator, after shopping with Jean and Eunice, we would store our packets of meat in their fridge. And each Saturday, they would bring one of our meat packets to us. Once, we bought a packet of "chicken cocktails" (thinking that they were mixed chicken pieces), and left it with them. Then one weekend we asked for that packet. Looking forward to cooking the chicken pieces, I opened it to find literally chicken cocktails, twelve pieces of them! I was used to eating cocktails, but not Liisa. But not wanting to waste food, especially meat, we finished those pieces in three meals (mostly eaten by me).

On their next trip to town, we gave a shopping list to Jean and Eunice. The next day, on their return, they stopped at our house to drop off our shopping. Jean held out a packet to us, saying, "We

noticed that you bought chicken cocktails the last time we were in town. You must like them, so we bought you another packet.” Liisa and I looked at each other, not knowing what to do. Finally, we burst out laughing and told our good friends the funny situation. Jean was willing to take back the packet and give it to one of their neighbours who liked cocktails. But a gift is a gift, so we accepted the packet, thanked her, and endured three more meals of chicken cocktails.

Through all these years I have had many friends, some for life, some for many years, and some for a short time. Through these friendships, the Lord made me look deep into myself, to deal with my faults and the sins in my life, and to let him deal with those sins by His loving hands. Above all, I have learnt that Jesus Christ is still my best friend, for life. Truly, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*.

### **Communication and technology**

In 2015, Liisa and I returned to PNG to supervise a recording of the Mauwake NT. Our arrival at Moro village was greeted with many people taking pictures of us with their smartphones! Yes, modern technology had arrived at the remote regions of PNG. They had leapfrogged from communicating using the *garamut* drum (slit gong) to mobile phones. I can now send Whatsapp messages to people in the village.



*Garamut*

I recall that from 1977 to 2000, there was no way to connect with the outside world except by a two-way single sideband (SSB) radio or through letters. In my first four years in PNG, I telephoned my family only once. Firstly, it was very expensive to make a call to Singapore. Secondly, it was only from town, or at our main centre, Ukarumpa, that I could call home.



*Speaking on our 2-way radio*

### **Letters from friends and supporters**

Letters were our main way of communicating with family and friends. In the early days, it took many weeks for letters to reach us, so that by the time the news reached us, it was already old news to other people.

Recently, I went through piles of letters from friends, saved from all my years out in the field. Those letters brought news and comfort from home. The sharing of these friends in those letters showed different sides of their lives. How I appreciated each one of them.

One particular set of letters brought great memories and comfort. For a few years, Sue would send me support monthly, and with the money she would write a prayer that she prayed for me. Knowing that

someone was lifting these prayers to a loving heavenly Father kept me going despite challenges, health problems and discouragements.



*Map of Papua New Guinea*

How did the letters get to us? First, the sender would post a letter to us at this address: Ukarumpa via Lae. A few weeks later, the letter would arrive at the Lae Post Office in the north of PNG. Then during the week, when there was a truck or plane from Lae to Ukarumpa, it would be delivered there along with bags of other letters. At the Ukarumpa Post Office, the letters would then be distributed to personal mailboxes at the centre. When there was a plane to Madang town, our letters would be put into red bags and placed on the plane. At Madang, the letters would remain at the provincial centre manager's office until he could find a truck going to our village or someone who was visiting us. So, letters could reach us as late as five or six weeks after they had been sent. Sometimes when we were informed that there were important letters, we would

request the local truck drivers to collect the letters for us when they went to Madang.

Letters from family and friends were our comfort, and they kept us going. Once, we waited the whole morning for letters as we knew that someone from town would be coming up our way. We rushed to the person when he arrived, but to our great disappointment, he told us that he had forgotten the letters. We both went into our rooms to cry. It had been close to two months since we had received a letter.

Once, our neighbouring team, Jean and Eunice, were eagerly waiting for their letters to arrive. A colleague, Rick, was coming to help make repairs to their house and would be bringing their mail. The centre manager had packed their letters in a parcel with some other things they had ordered. And so, Rick happily bumpity-bumped up 80 miles of rough coral-paved North Coast Road on his motorbike. He first stopped at our village to deliver our mail, and then carried on to Jean and Eunice's village. The two ladies opened their parcel with much anticipation. But their happiness turned to dismay when they saw a soggy mess. The "other things" were a carton of eggs! The rough ride over that 80 miles of road had made the eggs ready to be scrambled! All the two ladies could do was to salvage as many of their letters as possible, read whatever they could, and throw them away. After that incident, the centre manager learnt that eggs and letters did not mix. He would save milk cartons, line them with old newspaper, and pack the eggs in them.

### **Computers and email**

The days of letter writing ended when email came into being in the late 1980s. Technology really helped to bridge miles and time. What a relief it was when we were able to receive news almost instantaneously when Ukarumpa got an internet connection. In the village, we were still dependent on snail-mail.

It was in PNG where I first started to do work on a computer. In 1977, after the field orientation course in Madang town, Liisa and I went up to Ukarumpa, the SIL headquarters. I had a few months of transition before I went for the advanced linguistics course in Sydney, so I was assigned to help one of the teams input corrections to their

translation. The work was done on a Datapoint computer, with a small screen of only 8 lines of green text. I was so nervous the first few days that I worked very slowly, fearful that I would press the wrong button. In those days, there were no “delete” or “backspace” buttons! Mistakes made could not be deleted or corrected immediately. I was glad that I was only given two hours of access each day. As there were only six computers in the computer room, there was such a demand for their use that teams could only book one hour at a time, except for those which were nearing the completion of their translation.

In 1979, our first translation of Mark’s gospel was typed on a typewriter, and whenever typing mistakes were made, we had to make corrections on several copies. And we went through 10 drafts of the translation before we could typeset that first translation. It was slow and tedious work.

Imagine our excitement when the computer department announced that Radio Shack Notebooks would be imported for our use. These were our first personal computers. It was not much when compared to today’s laptops, but it freed us from the need to go to Ukarumpa to use the computers there. Every team could purchase a Notebook and have it in their village to type in their translation. Best of all, they ran on batteries. However, the data storage capacity was small. We could store only about a chapter of translation, and then the data had to be transferred to audio tapes. So, we all also had to get recorder machines that went *yi-or-yi-or* for an hour or so to record that one chapter of text on audio cassette tapes. And then some teams reported that their recordings were not 100% good, and they had lost some parts of the text. So, to be on the safe side, we would put in another tape as backup, with another hour of *yi-or-yi-or*.

I recall that one of the teams recorded their one chapter of translation on cassette tape, and when they played back the tape, it was practically empty, and they had already deleted the data from their Notebook. In anger, the team member flung the Notebook across the room. After a moment, in regret, she picked up the machine, thinking that surely it had been damaged. To her surprise, it was not, and worked fine.



Neither Liisa or myself was technically inclined. In fact, I used to get hot and bothered every time I had to use the computer, and reacted negatively to every new thing I had to learn. Liisa, with her patience, would help me overcome those negative attitudes. It took me some years to get used to using the laptop. Finally, I signed up for a basic computer course, and after learning the basics, I became more comfortable with using computers.



*Radio Shack Notebook*

In 1985, when some colleagues came back to Ukarumpa from their sabbatical with a Sharp laptop, they were the targets of our envy – we wished we could buy ourselves one! It was the latest model, with the screen on the inside of the cover, a forerunner of the present laptops. And although the screen was small, data was stored on a floppy disk, so no more would we need to use a recorder that went *yi-or-yi-or*. It was two years before we finally bought a Toshiba model, with improved floppy disks. With such machines, our work was speeded up. Corrections could be made immediately, and copies printed out on dot matrix printers for distribution to the village checking committee members for their input. And when we had good drafts of translated Scripture portions, we could print them out for distribution to the villages, so that people could have God’s Word in their language sooner.

More solar panels were bought and installed for us to have electricity to run our laptops and printers. And more batteries, and transformers were needed to convert 12V to 240V power. We thank God for such advances in technology that enabled us to have lights at night and energy to run all the machines for our work. Besides that, we also hooked our two-way SSB radio



*Batteries and transformers*

to the batteries for our daily communication with our headquarters, as well as occasional chats with friends.

We were so thankful for God's wonderful creation of airwaves, and the God-given talent to invent machines and gadgets to harness those airwaves which enabled us to communicate with each other over the miles. Praise His name!

### **Toilets and bathrooms**

Etched deeply in my memory is the lovely natural scenery which I lived and travelled among in those years in the field. However, equally well-remembered are the dusty roads and smelly, dirty toilets.

PNG is a beautiful country, with lots of rivers and waterfalls, big and small, almost anywhere one goes. PNGeans living in the rural areas can do without toilets or bathrooms. "Going to the bush" is the euphemism for going to the toilet. Washing in rivers and lakes is common practice. On our trips to town, there would be regular toilet stops. The truck would stop at the side of the road. Men would go to one side of the road, and women to the other, among the trees. Nothing to be squeamish about. No toilet paper? No problem, just grab some leaves.

I was visiting some colleagues and conducting some research in a mountainous area where the Seventh Day Adventists were working. The villages were known to be clean and tidy. As we walked along a trail, someone needed to go use an outhouse, and soon we found one. And what a unique structure it was! It was built of sawn timber, very unlike other outhouses which were usually made of raw timber and thatched roofs. And when I opened the door, what a surprise! There were two nicely built wooden toilet seats, side by side! We had a good laugh. Why two toilet seats side by side? Are two persons going to chat or to have a conference while sitting in that toilet? Was it built for a couple? Anyway, we were impressed, and the toilet was the cleanest I had seen in any rural region.

In my second field of service, where there were few bushes or trees in rural areas, it was common to see woman squat in an open field, holding an umbrella, and people would politely move or look away. Villages did have toilets, but sometimes they were so dirty and full of maggots that I would rather be out in the field amidst the corn.

The occasional toilet would be decently clean but the cubicles were usually without doors, and the walls only chest high. There would not be individual holes. Instead, the “toilets” would be a long trench with walls spaced about three feet apart above it. The worst toilets were the ones at long-distance coach stations. There would be a queue of women standing right in front of someone squatting in the cubicle. There was no privacy at all. I had been in that position a few times. And the stench was something else. It reminded me of my childhood stays at my aunt’s home in Pek San Teng, a rural area in Singapore where the outhouse was built over a pond. The smell was similar, full of earthiness and ready manure for crops.

While I often chaffed at having to pay a high fee to use a filthy toilet, I was once pleasantly surprised that I was not charged for the use of a relatively clean toilet. The owner had even devised a cover with a handle. I was rather impressed by that, and asked why a toilet at the side of the road would be free. The surprising answer was that the owner collected the manure for his crops! What a clever idea!

## **Bathing**

Travelling out to remote areas to do translation consulting work meant that washing in streams and rivers was the usual practice. Water from the mountains and hills was pure and clean, but so cold. Having a wash in the open was a challenge.

Once, on a visit to a village in PNG, I was in a river surrounded by curious women, a ready audience watching me having my wash. I had a sarong on, like the village women in the kampungs would do, but found that I wasn’t quite adept at it. I was afraid the sarong would unravel and fall off any moment! It would have been an embarrassment.

After a few more times of washing in a river, I devised a long robe-like garment with an elastic band that I would drape from my neck, with two holes at the level of the elbows for my hands to reach out for soap and shampoo. No more would I have to fear the sarong unravelling in front of an audience. And I did not need to go behind a tree to put on dry clothes. That could all be done under the cover of my hanging robe!

This is a picture of me in a river on an island in Bougainville. It was such fun to first have a good wash and then immediately wash my clothes in the river. The water was swift flowing, so the clothes were naturally rinsed just by being in the river.



*Washing in a stream*

Another time, I was checking the translation for a team in a mountainous region. The old water tank had a leak, so when the team returned to the village, there was no water in the house. Having a shower meant climbing down a steep trail and showering under a natural mini waterfall. It was so refreshing! But then climbing back up the steep trail was not so refreshing – I was drenched with sweat by the time I reached the house.

To make it easier for me, my host kindly arranged for neighbours to fetch water so I could have my shower in the house. The bucket shower was repaired and water poured in. And I had to stand in a big basin to save the water for flushing the toilet. I finished showering, and was thinking that it was great to have such a good shower when, CLANG, the shower head detached from the bucket, fell onto my head, and down the front of my chest. I quickly wiped myself dry. I stepped out of the bathroom, and the



*A streak of tar on my face*

people sitting there burst out laughing, pointing at me. There were black streaks on my face and neck! Having nothing else at hand, the host had mended the shower head with creosote (a tarry substance) which the warm water had softened, and the falling shower head had

smearred black streaks on me. Well, it was back to the shower with more boiled water, and kerosene to wash off the black streaks on my face and body.

On another occasion, I was on a visit to Saramun, an inland Mauwake village, to check some translation. That afternoon, my host said to me, "There are two streams nearby. When you need a wash, go to the one on the right, behind the trees. The water there is clean." In the late afternoon when the sun was setting, I went to the stream on the right to have my wash. As I glanced up, I noticed that there was a path where people could pass by and watch me. There was no way I wanted to have an audience. So, I went to the stream on the left of the village. The water there was not so full, but no problem – I picked up several rocks and formed a dam across the water, and so had a refreshing wash. Later, my host returned to the village to prepare dinner. He asked me, "You went to the stream to have a wash?"

"Yes, I did, at the stream on the left."

He looked at me, incredulous, and said, "Didn't I tell you to go to the stream on the right?"

"The other stream was just as good."

"Wild pigs usually go to that stream, and dirty the water. We don't go there!"

What could I say? I had had my wash, and did not feel too dirty. Sure, I had shared a stream with pigs! Two days later a strong stench pervaded the village. My host rubbed it in when he came to tell me that a pig had died upstream. I wished he had given me the reason for not washing in that stream in the first place! In all these, I was reminded that God created this world to be shared; every creature, whether, two-legged, or four, has that right. That is God's goodness for all his creatures. Live and let live.

### **Little creatures**

Moving from the concrete jungle of Singapore to PNG, I learnt more about nature which surrounded us, and the little and big creatures which are all part of God's created world. Although we sometimes had to rid our house of them, we tried not to hurt them unless they posed a danger to us, like the centipedes and snakes.

It was in the middle of the night; I woke up scratching myself crazily. I switched on my torch, and saw dozens of ugly bites and warts. No, those could not be from mosquitoes as I was in a mosquito net. The beam of my torch flashed on dozens of bed bugs! Yucks! They were crawling all over the mattress and the sheet! Heedless of the awful smell, I squashed many of them. Needless to say, sweet slumber fled, and I sat up most of the night, and the first ray of sunlight was the most welcome sight. The next morning, a very apologetic hostess poured several tubs of boiling water over the floor of the house, especially between the slates. She also wondered aloud why they had not been bitten even though they were sleeping in the same room. Perhaps I was new blood!

That happened when I was again visiting Saramun village to check some translations that we had completed, and to do some Bible studies with the people there. I was housed in a lovely room in a large house at the edge of the village. But little did I know that I would have to share my room with hundreds of bed bugs.

Mosquitoes, ah mosquitoes! They were a constant problem, and avoiding contracting malaria was a major concern. We needed to take prophylactics every week, and had to sleep under mosquito nets to prevent the sickness from surfacing. However, when we became overworked and tired, the parasite that was already residing in the spleen would move into the bloodstream, and the sickness would rear its ugly head. We would be down for more than a fortnight; first to recover from the sickness by taking quinine, and then to recover from the side effects of that medication! Once, Liisa, who was on a course of quinine, kept throwing up, and was unable to keep the quinine down. She needed to go to the town for treatment. Fortunately, the nuns of the local high school were going to town that afternoon, and gave us a ride. How we thanked the Lord when they dropped us at their Roman Catholic district hospital where Liisa received better care than at the government hospital.

We were so relieved when, years later, an alternative medication with no side effects, Artesunate, became available. No more quinine, no more heavy heads for more than a week till that medication wore off.

Generally, I am not afraid of insects, and have a live-and-let-live relationship with them. Besides bedbugs and the ubiquitous mosquitoes, we also had to contend with fleas and sandflies. Bites from the latter two types of pesky little creatures would give me an itch for weeks. So, I dreaded visiting Sikor, another Mauwake village, to check our translation and encourage the people to read their own language. This village has a black sand beach, and sandflies love that sand. No sooner did I step into that village than hundreds of those little creatures would be attacking any exposed part of my arms and legs. Even a thick layer of baby oil would not deter them. They were hungry for new blood.

There were other insects that we came across. The ropes between the coconut trees that held up our two-way radio antenna were the highways for the big red ants to get into our house. We often found them marching in rows across our kitchen counter. Although we found them a nuisance, we would not kill them as that would have been messy. Instead, we would pound on the counter to scare them away, and within seconds they would be gone.

### **Not-so-little creatures**

There were others of God's creatures that I met on my various trips, like lizards, snakes, millipedes, centipedes, or the stone fish in the shallow reef. They meant us no harm unless we were unfortunate enough to disturb them.

Liisa was laughing so hard, more than I'd ever seen her laugh before. What caused it? I was sitting under our sitting room light, doing some reading. Suddenly, I felt some liquid on my forehead, I looked up and then got another splash of liquid on my face. It was a huge, black lizard, and it had urinated on me! Was I mad! I picked up some rubber bands, quickly folded some paper and started shooting at it. And of course, I kept missing, and the lizard was hanging its head down and looking at me. It must have been wondering what all the fuss was about. And Liisa could not help laughing.

Why were the lizards in our house? We were using solar energy, and in order conserve energy, we would have only one light on at a time. That one light was not only useful to us, it was also useful to the

lizards in the house. As the only bright light in the whole village, it attracted all kinds of insects, and the insects attracted the lizards that would feed on them. Hence the lizard doing his business just above me!

I would avoid bigger lizards, but would sometimes try to make friends with little lizards. Once, to overcome my fear of them, I decided to quietly put my hand near a small lizard, and let it climb and walk all over my hand. I felt that it was an achievement.

On the other hand, I would not tangle with a snake, which were also common in the village.

The neighbours' chickens would always find a safe spot in the storage shed under our house to lay their eggs. The eggs were safe from humans, but not from snakes. One day, having been away from the village for several weeks, we returned and found that half the eggs in a nest had been eaten, and a snake coiled around the nest. We got some young men to help us catch and kill it, although it was not a poisonous one. I said to Liisa that we would need to expect its mate to be around, as snakes normally move in a pair. Sure enough, one evening, as I was going up the steps to our house, the snake was there rearing its head to strike. Thank the Lord, I saw it before it could strike; I turned and ran down the steps, calling the village men to come for it.

Another time, I stepped on a snake and didn't get bitten! Was that a miracle? God's protection? That happened at Nobonob, our regional centre in the hills. It was the dry season, and Ben, the centre manager, had stretched a thick black hose between two houses to channel water from one to the other that was running low on water. It was after 7 pm when I left the manager's house to walk back to our accommodation. Treading in the dark, I stepped on a "hose", and then turned around and shone my torch at the spot. The black "hose" was actually a snake! How very thankful I was that it did not strike when I stepped on it. In fact, it hardly moved, but it was not dead. Its stomach was distended as it had probably swallowed a mouse or a chicken. It was just lying there savouring its meal when I stepped on it! Ben, our centre manager, came running with a parang when we shouted, "Snake!", and chopped off its head. The next morning the local men told him that it was not a poisonous one. I remember the Scripture verse in Mark 16, how that



Lord promised protection for his disciples from snakes and other dangers.

The first time we stayed away from our village house for several months, we returned to a house that had been overrun by mice, lizards and ants. The kitchen counter was filthy with their “calling cards”. In fact, we had to deal with mice all the time we lived in Moro. The mousetraps were in constant use. Several mice would be caught over a few days, and then we would have peace for the next few days. Then the traps had to be set again as we noticed droppings here and there. Whole families of mice would move in, so we would see big ones and small ones in the traps in the mornings. It was such a pity to kill those little creatures, whose eyes were still bright and clear even in death. Having seen the destruction of our friend’s mattresses by mice and geckos, I made a 6ft by 3ft box to store all our mattresses and pillows whenever we left our house.

Centipede and scorpion bites were common in the village. We had seen villagers walking around in great unrelenting pain for a week from such bites. One day, as our neighbours were gathered in our sitting room for chats, and the kids were sprawled on the floor with toys and books, up crawled a 20 cm-long red centipede (red ones are more dangerous than black ones) from under the bench. Someone whacked it with a machete, but it would not die, and the two parts were still wriggling and crawling! Finally, we had to kill it with hot water. What a relief that none of the kids was bitten.

I was on Bougainville Island checking translation for two teams. In one of the villages, the translators lived in a lovely big house in the middle of a cocoa plantation. The only problem was that the toilet was away from the house, a low hut in the middle of the cocoa trees. In the day, it was all right to walk there, but after dark the situation would be different. As I walked to the outhouse, I would be stamping my feet to scare away the hundreds of toads on the path. As I reached the outhouse, I would hit the walls to scare away the toads inside. Shining the torch into the hut, I would see a few toads, too scared or too slow to move. Shining the torch on each of them made them too scared to move at all, until I was done.

The roads in Bougainville were destroyed during the civil war, and to get to one village, we had to go upriver by boat. On the way, we saw up to eight huge crocodiles sunning themselves on the banks of the river. I was sure glad that at that moment they were more interested in enjoying the sunshine than looking for a meal of a boatload of humans.

“All creatures great and small, the Lord God made them all...”  
Some we avoided, some we lived with and some we have eaten. They were part of our lives on the field.

## Chapter 5

### Travel Tales



As part of my work, I had to travel often to different towns and cities, and also villages, to meet the teams to check their translations or to give some training. In over 40 years in two fields of work, I have experienced so many different modes of travel, delays, encountered strange situations and different people. I have also been helped by some people. Let me share some memories about travelling...

Ukarumpa, the headquarters of our organisation in PNG, is set in a highlands valley more than 5,000 ft above sea level. To get there from the village, we first had a four-hour truck ride to Madang town, followed by a 40-minute flight across the mountains to Ukarumpa. A few times, we took the seven- to eight-hour road journey from Madang to Ukarumpa, first through a long lowland valley, and then up the winding highlands highway.

The thought of leaving the village to head to Ukarumpa usually gave me headaches and sleepless nights. Liisa and I would have to make decisions on various matters, and would get in each other's way as we packed up the house. Everything in the kitchen had to be packed

into mice-proof boxes. The night before we left the village would be a sleepless one as we had to wake up as early as 3 am to shut down the fridge and clean it, pack the mattresses and bedding into a specially-built mice-proof box, and wait for the village truck that would come between 5 and 6 am. And we also had to pack breakfast to eat on the four-hour ride to town.

### **A matter for prayer**

Travelling to or from Madang town from Moro village could be quite interesting, and also a matter for prayer. We had to pray hard that the drivers would come to pick us up as promised. Many were the times when we waited and waited, and the truck did not turn up. Once we arranged with a driver that we would leave for town at 7 am, but he needed to leave at 5 am, and he just left without us!

Another time, the truck was impounded the day before by the police because the owner was three months overdue in his payments. The driver neglected to inform us when he returned to the village. It was only when we sent someone to check on him that we found out the reason for his no-show. By that time, most of the trucks going to town had already left. All we could do was to unpack and spend another day in the village, and arrange to travel by another truck the next day, praying that the driver would take us.

The North Coast Road, the main road to the village, crossed some 40 big and small rivers, and during the wet season many interesting things would happen. Once, early on in our life in PNG, we were about to travel back to the village. However, just before we started, we heard that one of the major rivers in the region had changed course! It was the rainy season, and so much rain from the mountains had rushed down that the floodwaters from the river had washed out the banks, and formed a new channel. The bridge was left high and dry, and the new channel was impassable. However, the people in the orientation course needed to get to their allocations.

Sam, the centre director, had a plan. He had been at the river and saw the boss of a local hotel shuttling his cartons of beer across on a barge. Sam then arranged to borrow the barge the next day. So, the next day saw us all driven to the end of the bridge. We handed our boxes

down from the bridge, and they were loaded onto the barge. A rope had been strung across the river, and Sam swam across the river with the barge, with another rope tied to his waist and attached to the first rope in case he was swept away by the current. He shuttled us and our boxes across, and on the other side, we hired trucks to take us to the villages we needed to get to. We were always grateful when our trips were completed, and we reached our destinations safely.

On other occasions, our travels were made unpredictable due to human factors. Once, we asked a local driver, Toiyan, to drive us to town to catch a flight. The night before our trip, Toiyan had been given many bottles of beer by the men who had sold their copra, and he spent the night drinking. In the morning, he was dead drunk and in no condition at all to drive the truck to town. We waited till 8 am, and he had still not turned up. But he had promised us and others to bring us to town! As we had a flight to catch that afternoon, his maternal uncle (a dominant figure in their culture) went to wake him up, and forced him to drive after drinking a cup of strong tea. So we went to town, with Liisa and I sitting in the cab next to him. He was all right for the first hour, but as the effect of the tea wore off, the truck started swerving left and right. Fortunately, all the trucks along that stretch of road had left for town earlier, and the road was empty. The men sitting at the back of the truck behind us kept shouting to us, "Hey you two, please talk and talk to him. Keep him awake!" Finally, poor Toiyan said to us, "Please let me sleep for a few minutes." We gladly did. We wanted to get to town safely. After 10 minutes, he was ready to drive again, but drove very slowly. We sure were glad that we got into town without any mishap!

We did not always get to sit in the cab with the driver. Most times we sat along the side of the truck bed with the bags of copra in the middle. Once there were more than 30 big bags of copra to be trucked to town. The roof cover on the truck had to be removed. The bags were piled up till there was hardly any space for passengers. After our boxes and baggage were strapped on, we just climbed up and sat on the bags of copra, and held on to the ropes, without any shelter from the sun. That trip took more than four hours.



*Travelling on a truck*

Friends and colleagues, and villagers in Moro, often suggested that we get a vehicle of our own so that the problem of transport would be solved. We had adamantly refused to get one for several reasons. The first reason was that having a vehicle in the village meant that it would be the ambulance to ferry people in the village needing to go to the hospital 35 miles away. We would rather spend time in translation than to act as ambulance drivers. Second, neither of us was mechanically inclined, and if there were any breakdowns, we would be helpless. And the third reason was that I did not know how to drive, and was not inclined to learn. (I did eventually learn to drive at age 52, and got a license at 53!)

#### **At the right time in the right place**

Another time, I travelled back to PNG from Singapore. When I landed in Port Moresby, I did not anticipate the problems I would run into. It was a holiday weekend as it was PNG Independence Day. When I arrived at the airport, there was no one to receive me. As I was collecting my bags, a fellow Singaporean came up to me to ask if I was the missionary Kwan Poh San. I was surprised. It seemed that someone

who knew both of us had mentioned that I would be on the flight. As he noticed that there was no one to receive me, he offered me a ride to the missionary guesthouse in the city. How the Lord provided!

After two days, I was to fly up to the Highlands city of Goroka, and my ticket was with the Port Moresby centre manager. I called him many times, but the phone lines were down. The morning I was to travel, I was still trying to call the office, and the manageress of the guesthouse tried as well, but it was the holidays, and there was no one in the office. Again, God took care of the matter for me. By chance, the manageress of the guesthouse called an art gallery and the wife of the centre manager happened to be there at the time. She did not know about the ticket, but after the call, she went home straight away, found the ticket and rushed to deliver it to me at the guesthouse, and even gave me a ride to catch the flight. I arrived there just half an hour before the departure! Coincidence? No, I'm sure the Lord just took care of matters for me, and orchestrated everything so that the people would be at the right place at the right time to smoothen my way.

Waiting and delays are usually not pleasant, especially for the impatient ones. However, sometimes delays or change of plans are all part of God's timing.

One delay that I was thankful for was in the last year of our stay in Moro village. One morning I woke up early to prepare to leave the village by the local truck which I had arranged to take me to town. After an early breakfast, I waited for the truck to come by. Half an hour, one hour, and still no truck showed up. A village man went up to the main road to check with the villagers there, and he returned with the report that the truck had left hours ago. It was already 9 am, so no more trucks would be passing that way. Oh dear! I had to be in town that afternoon to catch the plane to Ukarumpa. We quickly turned on the two-way radio to call our regional centre manager to make a special trip to pick me up. He graciously agreed, but the trip would take him at least two-and-a-half hours.

So, I waited. Meanwhile, I walked around the village, and sat down to talk with some people. While I was sitting with one of our sisters-in-law, she suddenly burst into tears. She was ashamed to tell me the

reason, but after some persuasion, she finally opened up. It seemed that in the last few months, whenever her husband went fishing at night, his youngest brother would come to her hut, and scrape on the wall for her attention. His intention was to have intimate relations with her. She had kept that matter to herself because he was the leader of the new Christian group in the village.

How could he do that! If anything had happened, she would definitely have been blamed.

That delay in going to town gave me the opportunity to deal with this issue on her behalf. Liisa and I prayed, and then asked the young man to come to our house. With both of them present, we confirmed the facts. Fortunately, he admitted his wrong, and asked for forgiveness. He also shared that he had been having problems with such temptations, and asked for prayers.

I believe that God had caused that delay in my travelling to town that day so that I could confront that brother and help both of them to deal with their relationship. Through this incident and others, I learnt that it is important to be patient in the midst of delays and changes of plans. If we believe that God is in charge of our lives, then anxiety should not take hold of our hearts. Instead, the heart needs to be prayerful and ask for wisdom.

### **My (mis)adventures with motorbikes**

I had little luck with motorbikes. My first adventure with a motorbike was in February 1977. Part of the orientation course at Nobonob was learning to ride a motorbike and make simple repairs. I could not even ride a bicycle then, but after a few days, I decided to give it a try. I got on one of the smaller bikes, and went slowly round the compound twice. I was enjoying myself, and giving myself an imaginary pat on the back. I lifted my hand to wave to the director, Sam McBride, who had just come out of back door of the kitchen, and the machine crashed into the kitchen wall, making a huge hole in the asbestos!

When we started the literacy work among the Mauwake people, we needed to visit the people in about 15 villages to speak with them



about reading their own language. Walking to the scattered villages took much time, so we decided to buy two used motorbikes. Liisa's bike was 150cc, and mine was 80cc. Once, I was riding ahead when we were travelling back to our village. When I came to a narrow 20-foot-long bridge, I saw a dog on that bridge. Would it attack me? While looking at the dog, I missed the straight boards on the bridge, wobbled and flipped the bike! I found myself looking into the river; my head was beyond the side of the bridge. Thank God, I had not fallen in. But I grazed my knee, and was rather shaken. Picking myself up I decided to push my bike instead. Soon Liisa rode by, waved to me and went on her way! She was not aware that I had fallen. Soon after that, we decided to sell my bike and ride together on Liisa's bigger bike.

One day we were travelling to a mission station, off the main road and up a steep slope which was full of deep ruts. I would have preferred to walk up to the station, but Liisa suggested that we should try riding up on the bike. So up we went, but halfway up, we ran into a deep rut, and the bike wobbled and fell to the left. Liisa, fortunately, was not hurt, because the handlebar of the bike protected her. Somehow, my left foot was caught under the machine, and when the people came to lift the bike off us, my left foot was all bruised and was turning blue and black, and the big toe was quite crushed. I couldn't walk for a week and the toe was numb for many years. And now the darkened toenail is a reminder of the trauma.

In the end, we disposed of the remaining motorbike, and I concluded that two-wheeled machines and I do not belong together.

### **Travels in another country**

In my second field of work, travelling to smaller towns and villages meant riding in 18-seater buses. Fellow travellers were not confined to two-legged human creatures, but also two-legged creatures with feathers, or four-legged ones. As long as they stayed quiet, it was generally fine, but sometimes, the creatures decided to attract attention with their squawking and squealing.

On another occasion, my mentees and I were returning home to the city after staying in a village. Since it was a major holiday, the bus queue was just too long, so we decided to pay more and hire a private

vehicle. The boot was filled with the bags and boxes of seven passengers, and so there was no space for the box holding three live chickens that the villagers had gifted to us. So, there I was, seated next to the driver, with a box of chickens on my lap! As long as they stayed quiet, I felt all right, but every now and then the chickens decided to fight for space, and the box would wobble violently on my lap. To keep them quiet, I fed them bits of wet biscuits through the two-hour journey.

In the early days when “no smoking” signs were generally ignored, even by the drivers, the buses would be filled with smoke most of the way. That was when my face masks came in handy. And even in the cold winter months, I would keep the windows open wide so that the wind would blow the smoke away from me. That was the one of the travails of travels for me.

### **Less than pleasant bus rides**

When travelling with a friend to an island, the first part of the journey was by long-distance bus and then by ferry. We were both in lower bunks on the long-distance bus and were enjoying our ride. However, once we reached the outskirts of the city, the bus stopped and the driver and another man shouted, “Up, up, up!” We were made to stand up, and from under our bunks several planks were pulled out and laid across the bunks so more people could board. It was suffocating, because this blocked the airflow from the fans. Then, to make matters worse, six hefty men and two women joined us in the lower bunks. One of the men “commanded” us to move to the back of the bus to make room for them. Was I angry! I thumped the bed, and shouted, “Who are you to tell us to move? I paid for this berth here!” That hefty man was shocked that a little woman would defy him. He then told their two women companions to go to the back. But then their drinking and card-playing disturbed us. I would not let them smoke, and would complain each time a cigarette was lit. Somehow, we tolerated one another for those few hours together. How relieved I was when they eventually alighted!

The journey continued and the bus boarded a ferry between the mainland and the island. It was midnight when we arrived at the port. A few taxis were waiting, and one taxi driver came to us, and offered

to take us to our destination. He offered to take our luggage, but we declined, instead asking him to lead us to his vehicle while we handled our own luggage. He was offended by our refusal, and was grumbling about it all the way, "You look down on us island people. You think I'm going to steal your things. Huh!" We gave him the address of our hotel and he drove into the city. Then he claimed that there was no such hotel. He drove close to our destination, and then turned into another road, telling us to spend the night in another hotel! Can you imagine that? I told him that I could recognise the hotel building, and insisted that he drive to the address I had given him. And true enough, I saw the building! As he was unloading our luggage, he was still grumbling. By then, it was past 1 am and I was too tired to argue with him. We paid him, and quickly walked away. What a journey!

Another time, after a training session for translators in another city close to the border of Thailand, I was returning with a mentee to our home city. We were on a long-distance bus, and it was full. Just 45 minutes into our journey, we were stopped at a police checkpoint. The police boarded the bus and checked all our documents, and searched all our hand luggage. And because I was holding a foreign passport, I was asked many questions and my hand luggage was searched thoroughly. Then all of us were asked to leave the bus, except two men sitting two seats behind us. Every seat was upended and searched. Initially we were not clear about the reason for the search. Then it dawned on me that they were searching for drugs since the city we had started from is close to the Golden Triangle. We sat by the side of the road, without shade or water. There were muted complaints after half an hour. While we watched, the two men who were still on the bus were led out of the bus and into the police vehicle. The police proceeded to record statements from the drivers and conductors while we waited. However, for some reason, we were still not allowed to reboard the bus, and the police seemed to be waiting for something. There was no respite for us as that half an hour stretched to more than two hours. Finally, the police left, and we were allowed to reboard the bus and continue on our journey. Our anticipated mid-afternoon arrival became a late evening arrival. What an experience!

### Riding a horse down the mountain

On another trip, I visited a village at an elevation of over 4,000 m above sea level. After several lovely days there, enjoying the view, breathing in the mountain air, sitting close to a pine cone fire every evening, and enjoying the lovely meals of ham and fresh vegetables, I was ready to go home. After breakfast that morning, the elder brother of my friend came to the house with a horse. There was no vehicle to take us down the road, and they



*On a horse*

had decided to take a short cut via a trail that they would normally walk down. They explained that after several days of drizzle, it would be too difficult for me to walk the slippery trail covered with pine needles. So, like a grand lady seated on a horse, I was led down the one-hour trail to the road. What an interesting end to a great visit to my good friend's home.

### Get her to the 'plane on time

I have my share of airport stories. One that I recall clearly was in the Hong Kong airport. That day, I had decided to go early to the airport before my flight, intending to have a lovely bowl of rice porridge for breakfast. I had just entered the departure lounge, when I saw a Pakistani woman running from one person to the next asking for help. She seemed to have been seen off by relatives or employer, but once in the departure area, she could not figure out how to get to her departure gate. She could barely speak English. I went to her, and she showed me her boarding pass, and it showed a gate that was in another terminal, and the gate was closing in 15 minutes! I looked around for a ground steward to help her, but there was none around. So I showed her the yellow line on the floor, and told her to follow that

line to reach her gate. "Achaa (yes)" she said, and went forward, but after a few steps, she returned with teary eyes, shaking her head.

We had already lost a few minutes, so we had to run. I grabbed her hand and ran to the connecting train to get to the other terminal. Arriving there, we ran towards the gate. But by the time we reached gate 41, my lungs were bursting, I could not go any further, and told her to run straight to gate 49; they were calling her name then. But that lady stopped at gate 45! I ran forward, grabbed her hand and dragged her on. Thankfully, by then, the flight stewardesses had seen us, and ran forward. They could not thank me enough. They explained that if she had missed the plane, the airline would have had to bear the extra expense of putting her in a hotel, and then on another flight. That lady was too flustered to thank me. Those last 15 minutes were all a blur to her! She was quickly led to the plane, and the gate was closed, while I stood there catching my breath, thankful that we had got there in time. I was glad that I had had this opportunity to help someone that day, and still have time to eat my bowl of *teng chai zok* (sampan porridge).

### **Divine appointments**

Those long bus and train rides were good times to get to know fellow travellers and to share the gospel. Sometimes people were receptive, and discussions would follow, with opportunities for me to share about salvation through Jesus Christ. Sometimes, after a few minutes, the hearer would turn off and pretend to sleep. No matter what, those bus rides were good opportunities to share with a "captive" audience.

In 1999, my 7 pm Chiangmai-Bangkok train was delayed for three hours, due to a mechanical fault. Around 11 pm, we reached an intermediate station and a young lady boarded. I was in a sleeperette compartment, and the lady headed for the upper bunk above me. I smiled and nodded to her, and we had peaceful night.

By 6 am next morning, we were close to Bangkok. The train steward came to push the beds up, so that we could use the table for breakfast. The young lady climbed down, and sat across from me. The first thing she said to me was, "You are a Christian, aren't you?" I answered, "Yes, how did you know?" I was not wearing a cross nor holding a Bible at

the time. She replied, "When I came up the train and saw you, I saw so much peace in your eyes. I long for that peace."

In reality, I was going through a difficult time in my life, and I was struggling with some emotional problems from a broken and messed-up relationship with a colleague and friend. But I had had a time of quiet meditation and prayer just before she boarded the train, hence that look of peace. I suppose that the knowledge that the Lord loves and forgives comforted me very much.

Anyhow, we started chatting, and she told me that she was a lecturer in the university near the station where she boarded the train. She said that she had been attending church with a close friend. That friend had been baptised, and as a result was ostracised by her family. Having watched her friend's trials, she was afraid to take that step of baptism. I was able to share with her my own experience, how I was also punished by my mother. But through my perseverance, and through prayers, encouragement and personal witness, I was eventually able to help members of my family to believe in Jesus Christ. I shared how the Lord, by his love, transformed my mother, a strong-willed woman, and superstitious in many ways, to accept the gospel. Moreover, I also told her that once a member of a family believed in the Lord, the door of blessing would be opened for the other members of her family, and eventually they would also believe. She would be that door for blessing to flow and save her family. Taking that step of faith would be essential. I promised her that I would pray for her, and I did for several years. Although we have not kept in touch, it is my belief that she has taken that step, and that the Lord will open that door of blessing for her family. I will meet them in heaven.

On another night train from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore in 1982, I met Thomas and Danny. I was on my way home after visiting churches to share about my translation work in PNG. After initial introductions, we chatted about our lives. They two men were very interested in my life and work in PNG. I shared about my struggles at my calling, how I asked for God's affirmation and confirmation at each step, and how God confirmed to me his plan for me, how he moved things so that I would meet Liisa at the right time, and how we formed a team to work

for the Mauwake people. I was frank in telling them that while I lacked faith at each step, God bolstered my faith through loving teachers and friends who prayed for me and showed me the way.

At the end of the ride the following morning, Thomas and I exchanged email addresses. A week later I received a message from him. In that message, he revealed his spiritual struggles. He grew up in a traditional Christian family, worshipping at an established church in Kuala Lumpur. At that period, he was questioning the existence of God, and the relevance of church life, and was wanting to leave the church. My frank sharing of my doubts, and how God cleared my doubts at each step of the way made it clear to him that God was real, that he interacts intimately with those who trust in him, and also answers their doubts. My belief caused him to be willing to see God in a new light, and see if he was real. He started by sending his sons to Sunday School in a church, and would go to church with his wife, who was at that time not a Christian. I'm sure that it was God who had arranged that meeting on the train. He had his eye on Thomas.

Airplane, bus, train, truck, horseback... so many interesting travel tales, adding to the varied tapestry of life. Thanks be to God that He has kept me and my travelling companions safe through all these years.

## Chapter 6

# Experiencing God's Love



Some people have the mistaken idea that missionaries are stronger Christians than others, and are able to endure much. We are sometimes seen as supermen or superwomen. Contrary to such a notion, missionaries are pretty ordinary people, just like anyone else. We have our weaknesses, we break down under pressure, we face cross-cultural pressures, we misunderstand or are misunderstood. We get angry, we cry, we scold, we feel resentment...

God does not throw his people into the deep end and expect them to survive without his help and comfort. In his love, he sends people along our way to help us, he causes us to make decisions that bring blessings, and he even prepares us to face grief and pain. And in the midst of pain, he brings us seasons of peace and assurance.

All the years of serving God have given me opportunities to learn more about his love, his healing, his provision and protection. What I experienced in the following accounts would prove our God as the Living One who is a Father, Mother, Friend, Protector, Healer...



### **God the comforter and encourager**

In November 1976, I was in the last month of studies at SBC. By then, people in the college already knew that I would be joining WBT and would be going to Sydney for linguistics training. One day, half an hour before the end of class, the secretary to the dean of the English department came to me and told me to go to the dean's office after class as there was someone whom they wanted me to meet. Intrigued, I went straight there after class was dismissed. There, I met Eirlys Richards, a member of WBT Australia working in the Aboriginal branch. She was visiting friends in Singapore, and had been brought to SBC for a visit. When the dean heard that she was working with WBT, he felt that I should definitely meet her. And to my delight, she would be teaching at the linguistics course I was to attend in Sydney. Wow! I would see at least one familiar face when I went there a few weeks later. At the course, Eirlys and her co-worker, Joyce Hudson, acted as big sisters to me, and at weekends would take me out to visit places. How the Lord provided and settled my fluttering feelings of apprehension as I faced the future. He made sure that I got to meet a kind friend before I embarked on my first overseas trip, and my work in the future.

On the field, during one particularly trying period, I was feeling very low and close to packing up to leave. One morning, I told the Lord that I just felt like sitting in the bedroom with him, and not leaving the room at all. Going out of the room, I would have to face problems, and I would have to smile when I did not feel like it. I couldn't take it that people were coming to get this and that, but not interested in listening to God's Word. Even as I was complaining to the Lord, I heard him, as though speaking into my ears, "Don't worry, I will walk out of the room with you." So, I walked out of the room with tears in my eyes, and gratitude in my heart. The Lord understood my weaknesses, and at one of my low points he stood by me. From that day onwards, I would remind myself of that morning, that my companion was the Lord, and whatever trials presented themselves, he was there with me.

### **God wiped away our tears**

Standing with family members and friends outside the crematorium in June 1982, I watched the smoke rising up from the

place where we had just bidden farewell to our brother, Richard. He died in a road accident in Malaysia at the age of 29, leaving behind his wife and an 8-month-old son. The smoke rose against a sky that was bright and blue. At that moment, I was asking the Lord why the sky could be so blue when my mood was so darkened by this tragic death of my younger brother. I asked why God would take away my brother, when he had just become a young father. His family needed him. "God, why?"

A few days after the funeral, the phone rang, and a man asked for Richard. I asked him the reason for his call. His explanation was that my brother, the week before, had accepted the Lord. We had, in faith, given my brother a Christian burial, although he had not been baptised nor attended church regularly. Having chatted with him, I knew that he was accepting of the gospel but, like many young men, was too busy with work to have time for God. However, God in his mercy led my brother to go to an evangelistic meeting with my mother. And there he was counselled by this person, and accepted the Lord by saying the sinner's prayer.

When I told this man that my brother had passed away in an accident, he was stunned. On recovering from the shock, he assured me that my brother's prayer of acceptance was very sincere. I knew then that God in his mercy had given my brother a last chance to be reconciled with him. So, in the midst of our pain, we were comforted that we would see him again before the gracious Father who gave him that last chance. God was comforting us, assuring us that he was with us in this pain, and had taken care of our brother.

I was given confirmation of Richard's salvation even before his body was brought back from Malaysia. The morning after we received the news of his death, my quiet time reading was Genesis 45:25–28. Verse 28 said, "And Israel said, 'It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.'" The words that caught my eye were, "still alive", and somehow, I felt the Lord speaking to me, and assuring me that Richard was alive, although gone in the body. Our merciful Lord took matters into his hands for us.

Four years later, in March 1986, I was looking forward to going home for furlough and seeing family members, especially since I had

received news that my father had suffered a stroke. Then, that morning, I was told over our two-way radio that my father had passed away from a second stroke. Our centre manager and our regional director specially drove to our village to provide transportation to town, and if need be, to arrange flights for me. I went to the high school nearby to make a long-distance call and spoke with one of my brothers. The funeral had been arranged, and with the difficulty in getting flights in those days, I would not have been able to reach home in time for the funeral. I decided to wait till my furlough to go home.

My father had been going to church, but had not received baptism because of objections from someone in his life that he feared. I was worried for his salvation although he was given a Christian funeral. Two months later, after I reached home, I heard of the incredible love the Lord showed to my father. It was like this: Before Chinese New Year in 1986, he received the letter that I had written to him, in which I quoted John 3:16. That day, he went to my brother's home for the reunion dinner, and he mentioned my letter and how I had urged him to think on that verse. My niece, who was 12 years old then, quoted Romans 10:9 "If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." And she asked him if he believed in his heart and was willing to confess his belief in Jesus Christ. Immediately, he said, "I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ." Four days later, he had a stroke, and was unable to speak. Thank the Lord that, in his mercy, he gave my father that opportunity to confess his faith before others, before he had the stroke. Even in our grief, the Lord gave me and my family great comfort through his Word.

### **Even in the smallest matters**

In our everyday lives in the field, he made sure that we received his comfort and provision in tangible ways as well. Once, when Liisa was away at Ukarumpa and I had been alone in the village for some time, I wished I had someone with whom to converse in English, as I had been speaking Mauwake the whole time. Feeling rather lonely and sorry for myself, I said to myself, "If only there was someone to speak English to me!" That afternoon, suddenly two heads popped

up at my door, and then a third one. They were two young women from New Zealand, and a young German man. They were staying at the guesthouse at the high school nearby, had gone out for a walk, and decided to drop by at the biggest house in the village! They were answers to my prayers! Wow! The Lord knew just how to encourage his servant, even in a simple matter of speaking in a familiar language.

God showed me time and again that he understood my weaknesses. When Keiko came to PNG, I finally found a good Asian friend. Liisa and I are good friends and colleagues, but even then, I was looking for an Asian friend, someone who would understand the loneliness of being a minority in the midst of mainly Western colleagues. Keiko and I got on well together, and shared many things in common. Our relationship grew, but then we became too dependent on each other. I, especially, became too emotionally dependent on her, which put a lot of pressure on her. And as a result, she distanced herself from me. That feeling of being slighted increased the insecurity in me, and also a sense of unworthiness. For years I bore the guilty feelings, and wept for that broken relationship and asked the Lord for forgiveness for my selfishness.

Later on, in a counselling session, it was explained to me that such feelings were often felt by children of secondary wives as they subconsciously felt that they had no rightful place in the family. Steadied by that knowledge, I learnt to deal with that part of my life whenever that sense of insecurity surfaced. I know that the Lord understands my weakness, and He will heal me; and in faith, I know that one day I will be free from that sense of insecurity.

In the field, I learnt that God delights in showing love to his children. In the early days in PNG, apples were hard to come by. If we happened to be in town, and if there was a carton of apples available at the store, we would quickly buy some. If we missed them, we would have to go without for weeks or even months. Not that we lacked fruits as there were many delicious local tropical fruits. But apples, oranges and nectarines were treats.

We had been in the village for several weeks. One morning, I woke up with the taste of apples in my mouth, and I just felt like I wanted to

eat an apple. It was a strange feeling, because apples were not one of my favourite fruits. We were far from town, and would not be going there anytime soon. Even if we did go to town, there was no certainty that there would be apples for sale.

Around coffee break that morning, a van drove into our village. Out came a couple of our senior colleagues, Jerry and Jan. They were on the way to visit another team up the road and had stopped by to say "Hello" and to drop off mail for us. Jan arrived at our door first, and in her hand was a brown bag, which she held up, saying. "We didn't know what little gift to bring for you. Here are some apples." I could not believe my eyes and ears! Wow!

Was that a strange coincidence? I pondered over that for years, and asked myself what I had learnt from this incident. People might say that it was because of trust and faith, and since I was sent out by God, he would take care of my needs. However, I felt that such a conclusion was too focused on us, and not on God. My conclusion is that the Lord just delights to show his love to his children. In this apple incident, it was he who put that taste in my mouth that morning, and it was he who prompted Jan to buy those apples at the right time to meet a desire that he had created in me. He orchestrated it just to show his love for his child. I was overwhelmed by this blessing. Many a time, I felt unworthy to be either his servant or his child because of my sins, and my sometimes rebellious and unloving attitude, and yet he chose to show his love to this unworthy person. Isn't he a great God and Father?

Another time, God also fulfilled another of my secret dreams while I was going about the Lord's business. I was at Ukarumpa in the highlands for some workshops. We were staying at the house provided by Liisa's sending missionary organisation. One morning at breakfast, as I looked through the window at the meadow with cattle, sheep and horses, tears welled up – tears of gratitude and happiness. I was overwhelmed at that moment as I recalled that in my teenage years, I had looked at a calendar photo of an Australian meadow and felt a deep longing to go to a wide, open space to see horses and cattle. At that time, I had vowed that when I had the money, I would visit such a place for a while, to enjoy that luxury.

That morning, as I looked out of the window, I realised that God had fulfilled my teenage dream. With eyes brimming with tears, I thanked the Lord for his wonderful provision. In the midst of work, I could live in such an environment, and could enjoy such lovely scenery for weeks at a time. I said to him, “I don’t have to be rich to go to such places as a tourist, I just need to be obedient to You and get to enjoy such a place.” Once more, I was overwhelmed by God’s love. I am always thankful each time I think of that morning, and each time I can be in a wide, open space. The wide spaces remind of God’s love, wide and open to me.



*Ukarumpa scenery*

### **God heals emotional wounds**

*Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near.*  
(Isaiah 55:6)

God is the great healer. He heals with his love and compassion. His *hesed* love, faithful loyalty to his children and those who need him, is always available when we call on him and humbly pray and ask for his intervening in our situations. I have found it so in all my years of walking with him that he has for me.

In 1994, I attended a course on inner healing at Fuller Theological Seminary. There, I learnt that Jesus Christ’s power and authority could heal deep trauma and emotional wounds. This was a part in my life that

He healed: I was in my early teens and had begun going to my church's youth fellowship. One day, I went without my mother's knowledge. For that, I was punished so severely that it left a very deep emotional scar in my soul, one that was buried deep in my subconscious. I thank God for helping me lock that shame deep down for many years, so that it did not greatly interfere with my daily life.

However, during my teenage years I struggled with a deep insecurity, and had a poor self-image. I covered that up with a lot of jokes and fun. That deep insecurity left me ashamed even to stand up in a bus to press the bell to alight. (In those days, the bell presses were placed at the roof of buses, so that those sitting would have to stand up to press them.) I would let the bus go past my stop, until someone else pressed the bell. Sometimes I would alight two stops beyond where I was to alight, and then walk back. At that time, I could not fathom the reason for that shame. During that course in inner healing, I was able to put two and two together, and realised that it was that punishment that scarred my inner self so badly. One night, while deep in prayer about my situation, I asked for healing from that deep trauma. In a vision, I saw my teenage self, next to a pillar outside our flat, hiding my shame, and then Jesus appeared, standing next to me. I saw him cover me with a white robe and a big weight fell from me. But I was still reluctant to re-enter my home from which I had been sent out by my mother. The next image I saw was Jesus and me sitting at the staircase of the block of flats, having a conversation. That image of Jesus being with me recurs whenever self-pity and memories of that painful episode in my teens surfaces in my mind. Our Lord continues to heal.

I was close to 60 years old when I went the second field of ministry. In the first few years there, I was constantly on the go. I was so often travelling to different locations to check translations and give training to translation teams that I was hardly at home. My body was struggling with stress and tiredness after months of intense work. Due to the constant dealing with the Scriptures and languages, my mind was in overdrive, and sleepless nights were common. One night, after another sleepless night with many thoughts and images going through my mind, one image came into focus. The lofty mountains of the north of the province, surrounding a rich valley filled with rice fields or wheat





leader in their house church which was led by her mother. Then her grades slid and she lost interest in school, and was becoming hostile to her mother. That day, she had become hysterical and started yelling at her mother, refusing to acknowledge her as her mother. I saw a very confused and unhappy girl, and immediately I asked Shelley and her mother to pray for wisdom for me.

One thing that I noticed about the mother was that she was a typical “tiger mom”. She was demanding, and had been putting a lot of pressure on her daughter. The girl was expected to be a model Christian youth leader and to live by her mother’s high standards. The mother, a divorcee, was a high-powered woman who had built up six churches.

Shelley gave me a brief background to the situation. The daughter had been under the impression that her father had been paying her school fees, and she took it as proof that he still loved her, despite his absence. Then one day, she discovered that the source of her school fees was in fact her paternal grandfather. In that instant, she realised that she had been misled into believing that her father still cared for her, and she broke down and became hysterical.

Her hostility to her mother gave me the clue. Her rejection of her mother indicated that the mother was the root cause of her daughter’s emotional breakdown. Even as I was trying to minister to the daughter, she was hovering around quoting Scriptures and telling the girl why she should not behave that way. She had not an ounce of insight into her daughter’s emotional collapse. I had to ask Shelley to take the mother away while I talked with the daughter.

In actual fact, I did not counsel the girl. I merely told her that Jesus loves her. The Lord showed me that no words were needed at that time. I spent three hours just singing hymns of Jesus’ love, and holding her hands. That was what this poor tortured girl needed: to know that she was accepted and loved, not a preachy mother. I told her that Jesus did not demand that she be a model to other youth, or that she live by her mother’s standards of piety and constant church activities. She calmed down, and we sat and talked. Later, she told Shelley that those hours sitting with me had been the most peaceful time that she had

ever had. Unfortunately, after my second session with Jing, her mother decided to return to their home town, and we lost touch. I continued to pray for her healing.

Through many counselling experiences with hurt and wounded persons, I found that being a channel of Jesus Christ's healing power was more effective than all the human knowledge of counselling and words. My role was to sit there with the person and quietly call on Jesus, and let him and the Holy Spirit to do their cleansing and healing work. He is the greatest counsellor, healer and friend to those hurting ones.

Hong was another person who was brought to my attention. She was among a group of missionaries from her home province to the borders of a neighbouring country. She and others had returned for a cross-cultural course in the city, and I had been invited to lead discussions on language learning and cross-cultural work. In the middle of the course, I was asked to counsel her as she could not get along with anyone in the group. Everyone could feel her anger and hostility, and this hostility was particularly directed at a group coming from a certain province.

As we chatted, this was her account: She felt that her mother had neglected her children by going on long evangelistic trips, and her absence had exposed the daughters to abuse by male members of the extended family. Hong and her sisters suffered much. Then Hong decided to leave home, and a cousin promised her a job in another part of the country. On arrival, she realised she had been scammed. The "job" required her to become a sex worker. She suffered much for several months as she was locked up and forced to provide services. Eventually, a kind-hearted neighbour helped her escape.

Following in her mother's footsteps to be an evangelist, she volunteered to go to the border regions as a teacher. However, the previous experiences in her life made her a bundle of nerves, filled with resentment and hatred against most people. In our chat, I asked her to first give thanks for her life and for the escape from the people who had forced her into sin. Then we prayed for Jesus Christ to come to the situations where she was abused, and to forgive those who had hurt her and her sister. She opened her heart to him for healing, knowing

that in the depths of degradation, he was right there with her in her pain. However, it was very hard for her to forgive and to forget those awful days. We went through a few more sessions, and the love of Jesus softened her heart. Several months later, her supervisor reported to me that she was much more pleasant to be around. And although she would occasionally revert to her former self, she was more open to prayer and forgiveness.

I'm thankful to the Lord for allowing me to play a part in channelling his love and healing to those who are hurting, and need his restoration.

### **Physical healing**

God also provided physical healing when I needed it most. I recall, during the overnight survival hike of our field orientation course in PNG, sitting on a branch in a valley in the deep jungle, looking at the base of my left thumb. There was a deep cut, and I could see the white bone. There was hardly any blood, so I squeezed hard so that the blood would flow and clean the wound. Once it started flowing, it wouldn't stop! I sat there pressing hard to stop the bleeding, and the one and only band-aid that I had was no help at all. Lifting my hand above my head, I sat there looking around at the branches, fronds and vines, all cut and ready for building a temporary shelter for the night. And there I sat doing nothing except to pray for the bleeding to stop.

I had cut almost all the materials needed to build my shelter. I was chopping the last piece of vine when the machete struck my thumb. After half an hour of sitting, and as the sun was setting, the bleeding eventually stopped. Hurriedly, I began to tie the shelter together, and soon completed it. Lying in that shelter by a gurgling stream, I spent a lovely night. There was slight pain in the thumb, and that was all. And in two days, the wound was healed. A faint scar, after more than 40 years, reminds me of that incident, and I thank our Heavenly Father for taking care of me and healing me.

On the day before we allocated to Moro village, I stepped on a nail that pierced an inch deep into my left foot. The wound was cleaned, and I was told to rest. However, I felt that the nail wound was an attempt by the enemy to prevent us from going to the Mauwake

people. So, despite a swollen foot and terrible pain, I decided that we would go ahead with the move. We stayed in an open house on stilts, with only one section walled in as a bedroom. The toilet was 20 metres away from the house, surrounded by small bushes. It was getting to and from the toilet that was problematic. Two persons had to hold me as I went down the steps, and one to help me walk to the toilet. The pain was bad and the foot was much swollen, though strong antibiotics very soon caused the swelling to subside. That situation lasted for two weeks before I could manage it on my own.

Near the end of my time in PNG, God demonstrated his power to heal again. In a twin-engine, ten-seater aircraft flying low between the low clouds of a cloudy day and the high mountains of PNG, I was lying on a stretcher surrounded by oxygen tanks, accompanied by two doctors and a nurse.

That morning, I had had a very a severe asthma attack, and was almost dead, having an oxygen level of only 5%. On the concerted prayers of all the co-workers at our headquarters, I had started breathing on my own, otherwise the doctors would have had to insert a tube to assist me to breathe. Even then, it was decided that an emergency evacuation to Cairns in Australia was



*At the clinic during an asthma attack*

necessary. In the ICU ward, with medication, oxygen and constant care, I gradually started breathing easily again. However, the half-hourly medication and the noise of the equipment kept me awake and I hardly slept a wink. After a few nights, I was desperate for sleep.

After being stabilised, I was moved to the general ward. However, I was still not sleeping at all. It was just past 2 am, and the nurse had just given me the two-hourly dose of medicine. I just wanted to sleep. I prayed, "Lord Jesus, please come, and hold me like a baby, and let

me sleep.” Then I saw a figure in a light grey cloak lean over me, and I fell into a deep sleep. I didn’t wake up till the nurse pulled the curtains open in the morning. She turned around when she heard me stir in my bed. She said, “Oh, you’re awake. I came in to give you your medicine at 4 am, but when I saw you fast asleep, like a baby, I didn’t have the heart to wake you up.” I felt so deeply the love and care of Jesus at that time. From then on, I had no trouble sleeping in the hospital.

The same loving heavenly Father knows every person, and loves to be part of his or her life. I believe the same healing he effected in me, he will do to all those who need it. He is patient, and he heals through the power of his Son, whose blood cleanses and heals. As I experienced God’s healing and blessing, I look to his healing of my friends and others whom I meet.

## Chapter 7

# God Loves in Practical Ways Too!



Over the years of serving God, he has shown me how he loves people in very practical ways too.

### **God's love for the unreached**

God's sending Liisa and me to the Mauwake people is also an expression of his love for the unreached. And what more practical way than to send people to live among them, learn their language and culture, and give them his Word? He wanted to speak to them directly of his love in the language they understand best. We saw the eyes of the old people light up when they heard the accounts of Jesus in Mauwake. They would nod their heads when his teachings were read.

Moving into the Mauwake community meant moving into a different culture and into a very challenging spiritual realm. Like most of the peoples of PNG, the Mauwake people have deep dealings with the spirit world. Black magic and sorcery, rituals and superstitions, and inviting the spirits for help are part of their lives. From the day of his birth a person is shrouded in rituals and taboos. Past the age of puberty, boys live together in a house where they receive training from their maternal uncles (important relatives in their culture) to be men. Much of the training has to do with the spirit world. During

their initiation periods, when the teenagers fast in the jungle, their clan spirits are called upon to strengthen them and imbue them with their tribal powers.

For example, when a man goes pig-hunting, he believes that his clan spirit will give him success. And when he aims his spear at a wild pig, he shouts out the name of that spirit. However, when the men become believers in Christ, they have to denounce or disown these spirits. We found that if they believed in Jesus Christ in their minds without renouncing those spirits, they would be ineffective Christians. They would continue to be hobbled by those thoughts, and many would return to their dependence on their tribal rituals.

Much of our work among the people, when we chatted around their evening fires, was to talk about these beliefs, and we often had to remind them of the power of Jesus Christ. It was a constant battle for their hearts and souls, to lead them to trust fully in God for protection, wisdom, the well-being of their families and even the crops in their gardens. Switching their loyalty from depending on the power of the spirits to depending on the living God and his son Jesus Christ was not a one-time task. We had to work on every aspect of their lives. We were frequently discouraged, but sometimes, we could see that the messages had gotten through.

A young village woman and her husband had become believers. One day she had a very bad stomach ache, and she went to the local clinic and was prescribed some medicine. But the pain got worse in evening. I went to see her, and suggested that she went to the clinic again to get an injection or stronger medicine. She refused to go, saying, "No, you just pray for me, and Jesus Christ will help me, and I will be well." Such simple faith. The next morning when I met her, she told me that she was well. The pain had gone in the middle of the night. We have been encouraged by such faith in the midst of deep superstition and dependence on the spirits.

Any death or sickness would be attributed to sorcery. Even those who were believers fell into the temptation of calling the shaman or performing rituals to protect themselves.

One of the men in the village, Wenko, was being attacked by some female evil spirits. He had tuberculosis in the neck, and the sickness caused a deep sore in his neck. He was had such bad headaches that he could hardly sleep. After a few weeks, his sickness was healed, but the headaches remained. And every time he attended the funeral of a female in the community, his headache would so increase in intensity that he had to run home. It happened at least three times. He also saw black images at night and would be troubled in his sleep.

We had been teaching the believers in the new Christian group about worship and praise with prayer. One evening, our clan sister came to me with a request to pray for healing for Wenko. Gathering the group together, I explained to them about praying for healing, that it would not be a single person's faith or prayer, but the corporate effort of all believers. And I taught that it would be on the praise of God from the group that God would work. We spent some time in confession of our sins, and in singing praises to the Lord. Then our sister and I went into the house with Wenko, to pray for him. The group remained outside singing praises to the Lord. After Wenko explained his situation, I asked him, if he truly believed in the Lord, and to confess his sin. Although he was baptised a Lutheran as a child, he had not really known Jesus as his personal saviour, so I led him in the sinner's prayer, and he professed his belief in Jesus Christ. The moment Wenko prayed the prayer of belief, he felt a black image lifting up from his head, and his headache was gone immediately. Praise the Lord!

A ritual that the older men practised was calling on a spirit and aiming a spear at a storm in order to stop it. It demonstrated that magical powers could overcome natural phenomenon. One day a woman told us about a whirlwind in the village, which ripped the roofs off several houses. She was terrified, as her house was affected. No one else was in the village, and she could do nothing. As she watched, she saw the whirlwind twisting towards our house, and then it just disappeared! She told us later, "I believe that the God whom you talk about is powerful, and he protected your house." She also recalled that Jesus stilled the storm in the Bible.





*Moro village*

Aduna was the food kukurai, one of the three headmen in the village. He had authority over the agricultural activities in Moro village. He was the one to decide when the people would start their ploughing and planting season, and when they would harvest their first taros. He knew certain rituals, and people relied on him to bring in a good harvest. He was known to have some magical powers to hurt those who disobeyed him, and also to heal. But after hearing the Scriptures read in Mauwake over several weeks of evening meetings, he came to realise the power of Jesus Christ. When people came to him for “healing” or any problems with their gardens, he would tell them to come to us for prayers to Jesus. He understood that only Jesus had the power to provide, and desired to show his love.

### **God the protector**

Fears and dangers, real or imagined, were part of our lives. But the Lord was by our side all the time. His protection assured us of our safety, wherever we went.

We did not take safety for granted, especially when travelling. In PNG, we would pray for protection when we travelled to and from the village, and when we flew between Ukarumpa and Madang town. We are thankful that over the years our prayers were answered. This

is not to say that our trips always went as planned! There were times when the village truck, for some reason, did not pick us up from the village, and we had to go to the highway to hail another truck. If we were fortunate, we would be allowed to sit in the cabin next to the driver. Most of the time, however, we would be sitting among the bags of copra, or if there were more than 30 bags in the truck, even on top of the bags.



*A truck stuck in the mud*

Although we did not encounter accidents or spills, there were other dangers. Once, when we were one hour into our journey, the road was so muddy that a truck ahead of us got stuck in a bog. This was common during the rainy season where the roads would sometimes be flooded so badly that we would have to turn back midway. On this day, several trucks were lined up behind the truck that was stuck. Many men were dumping stones into the ruts to help the truck gain some traction to drive out of the mud. Fr Jooren, a Roman Catholic priest, was also waiting in his Suzuki. He came to me and pulled me aside, saying, "See that tall thin man standing nearby? He's from Simbine, and a few moments ago, he asked my permission to you kill you both."

Not very comforting words. A few days earlier, we had heard that that man had gone to the high school nearby with an axe, and threatened to kill the teachers and nuns there. I was very worried, and immediately walked over to Liisa, and told her what Fr Jooren had told me. We moved as far away from that man as possible.

Just then, I saw that Fr Jooren had managed to manoeuvre his Suzuki out of the mess and onto the grass beside the road, and was driving off, passing all the trucks. I sprinted forward, waving and shouting for him to stop. Fortunately, the boys sitting at the back of the Suzuki saw me waving and alerted him. I asked if we could travel with him. I felt that God had sent him to warn us and provide protection, and we ought not stay where a madman wanted to kill us. Fr Jooren agreed on condition that we leave our baggage behind in our original truck. This was not a problem for us, and we gratefully hopped in.

Later, when our luggage arrived on the truck, we heard from our fellow travellers that when we left with Fr Jooren, the madman had been looking for an axe to borrow. They were greatly alarmed and told the men with axes not to loan him one as they knew he was not in his right mind. How we thank our Father for sending Fr Jooren at the right time, and for the other men who prevented the madman from getting an axe.

There were more instances when God provided protection for us and our possessions. In Moro village, we would visit different households in the evenings to chat and learn more about the language. We frequently visited the household of Bang and Ponkila, an older couple we addressed as “father and mother”. Their house was only two houses away from ours. One night, they casually mentioned that sometimes they would sit in front of their house and watch over ours, especially when we were away from the village. They were worried that people would break into our house to steal our possessions. One night, close to midnight, they saw two men in white clothes standing on the landing of our house. They did not enter the house, but stood there guarding the front door. Bang and Ponkila knew then that God had sent his angels to look after our house.

They were not the only ones who saw the angels. Another time, our village father was walking back to his house in the middle of the night. As he walked towards his house, which was next to ours, he saw two white figures standing around our house. He was so terrified that he ran home.

The walls of our house were made of stacked palm fronds up to a height of about three feet. Above the palm fronds was a flimsy wall of wire-mesh. The main door was covered the same way. It was easy enough for anyone to slash the mesh and climb into the house. Once, we were in our house working hard on translation with two young men from the village. It was the time of the year when there were not many people about in the village as most people were busy on their farmland, clearing the land and preparing it for planting. We were absorbed in our riveting task when, suddenly, we heard a woman shouting and screaming, "Where's everyone? Why are you not taking me to town? You lazy bunch of men!"

She spotted the two young men working in our office and, screaming, ran up our steps and tried to open the door. Fortunately, although it was unlocked, she could not open it. After shouting for a while, she went away. We quickly sent the two men away by the back door and locked the front door. She returned and shouted for the men, and was slashing at the wire-mesh with a small knife. Liisa and I were scared, and discussed what to do. I suggested that Liisa lock herself in the bathroom (the only room in our house with a lock), and I would open the front door and talk to the woman. We felt it was the only way to stop her from shouting. After Liisa had gone to the bathroom, I quickly opened the front door, and locked it from the outside, not knowing what to do next. I didn't even have time to pray! I was sure Liisa was praying in the bathroom.

At that moment, our Lord gave me wisdom. To calm the woman down, I raised my voice and agreed with her. I shouted that the young men in the village were useless men, and they were not hardworking, etc. Surprised that someone agreed with her, she calmed down, and sat on the stair landing with me. Here was someone who was on her side! She claimed that she had received a letter from her husband telling her

to go to Port Moresby to see him, and she needed transport to go to town. She showed me the “letter” which turned out to be just a piece of blank paper. However, having been heard, she was pacified. I believe that God gave me the wisdom that day to deal with that situation and protected us from harm.

The woman did not return to our village again as her relatives forbade her to come. Sadly, she died a few months later. I heard it whispered in the village that she had been secretly poisoned by her family as they had despaired of managing her aggression. She would chase people around with a machete and overturn cooking pots of food if she was hungry and the food was not ready. They did not have many options to manage her mental condition as there were only two mental institutions in the whole country. In the end, they resorted to the traditional way of solving the problem.

Living in a village also had its share of dangers from the natural environment. One morning, we woke up to see that seven coconut trees close to our house had had their tops lopped off. Lightning had struck the trees in the night, but our house had been spared as the trees had diverted the lightning strikes. We were worried about our radio antenna which was tied to two other coconut trees, with a line coming down our house and attached to our two-way radio. This was our only means of communication with the outside world. From that day on, we would detach the aerial from the radio and attach it to a ground wire, to ground any electricity in the event of lightning striking the antenna. One night, the lightning strikes were particularly close, and I could not sleep. Sitting up to pray, I saw Jesus Christ standing at the top of our radio antenna with his arms raised, as though he was commanding the lightning to go elsewhere. This picture gave me great assurance that he would take care of our house and radio.

PNG is in the Pacific Ring of Fire, so tremors, earthquakes and tsunamis are common. Moro village was on the coast, and we had been told of a tsunami in 1935 which had struck that stretch of coast. We had observed huge coral rocks in the pathways to the gardening areas, and realised that these had been thrown inland during that incident. Fortunately, very few lives had been lost because the population was

sparse then, and many people had been in their gardens at the time. Having been warned, we were very careful to protect all the work that we had done. Eventually, we both bought waterproof and floatable laptop cases to store our machines at night in case a tsunami should strike and we had no time to escape. Even if we did not survive the disaster, we hoped that the materials in our laptop would be preserved and eventually accessed, and the work passed to someone in our organisation.

In 1998, a huge tsunami struck Aitape, in the Sepik region, west of where we lived. Between 2,100 to 2,700 people perished, and many homes were destroyed. It was disastrous for the people of that region and for our colleagues who lived there. We were thankful that those of us in the Madang region were spared. We had taken what precautions we could, but we are thankful to our Lord that we did not have to face the danger of a tsunami during all those years in Moro.

Once, a very strong earthquake hit the Madang region. Wooden houses at the epicentre of the earthquake were so shaken that the house posts had gyrated in the ground to form big holes, but the houses did not collapse. We were fortunate that our house was so well-braced and sturdy that despite being shaken hard, it held up and remained standing.

We saw first-hand that Bible translation was a battle against the evil one. The evil one hates God's Word to go out to the people, and we knew that he would want to disrupt our work or to somehow delay us. But we know that in God, "in everything we are more than conquerors..." (Romans 8:37). The first gospel account we translated was Mark. After it was published, we would read it often at the evening gatherings in the village. Our prayers were always that the miracles and the power of our Lord Jesus Christ would draw the people to him.

The evil one would use any and all means to destroy our work. We stored our computer disks in ammunition boxes to protect them from the tropical dampness. Once we completed a piece of work or a translation of a book of the Bible, we would promptly send copies on disks to our friends elsewhere for safekeeping. But the evil one would use computer viruses to destroy our work. Once, after completing our translation of Romans, I was going to make some corrections. When I opened the file, the most up-to-date file of Romans went from 118,000

bytes to 8! Even the backup files were affected. Fortunately, Liisa's laptop had the next-to-last version, and it was uncontaminated. We got a printout of that file, and spent a whole day inputting all the corrections.

In my second field of ministry, Hua was one of the first persons I met and spent time with. At that time, she was house-helper and language teacher to the colleague who hosted me in that city. In her early 20s, she had newly become a Christian, and was active in a group meeting every week. One evening, just after my dinner, I received an urgent call to go to their meeting place as she was having a spiritual attack. She was speaking in a strange way and behaving in a disruptive manner, and the terrified young people there did not know how to handle the situation. I took her to another room, and with some others, laid hands on her and prayed, and soon she returned to her normal self. The Lord gave me the insight to teach the young Christians there that they should trust in the authority of the Lord, and not be scared of such situations. I also taught them that it was the Holy Spirit challenging the evil spirit within her to expose itself so that it could be dealt with. After that, whenever Hua was not her normal self and behaved in a disruptive manner, they knew how to use that authority of Jesus Christ to challenge the spirit to stop.

Later, Hua went to work in an orphanage and I heard that she would occasionally fall onto the road as she cycled. It looked like the spirit wanted to harm her, and perhaps even cause her death. Several times she narrowly missed being run over by other vehicles. We kept in touch with each other, but were both busy with work and had little time to meet. All that while, I kept on praying for her, that she would be free from the evil that bound her.

One day she called me, and asked me to accompany her home. Her father was very concerned about her being out in a big city and wanted her to perform certain shamanistic rituals for her protection. She was against doing that, but her father was angry that she had delayed returning home several times, and she had run out of excuses. She needed help and encouragement now that she had agreed to go home for a visit. Another friend, Pu, went with us to the village up in the mountains. That evening we slept in an upstairs room. The next

room was locked, but we were told that her father's idols were lined up on a long counter there. Before we slept, we sang hymns of praise, and prayed together.

That night, I had a vision of Jesus walking up the stairs and along the corridor. Next morning, when we were praying together, Pu started to cry, and at first refused to say what was troubling her. I thought that she was hurt by my speaking strongly to her the previous night. However, after some minutes, she told us that throughout the night, she kept hearing a voice saying to her that she would be a failure, she would not have any power to do anything to help Hua against the spirits, and she should go home. That was the cause of her distress. However, she was reassured after I shared with them my vision of Jesus walking in the corridor and her feeling of oppression lifted. We spent the morning visiting Hua's relatives, and when her father realised that his daughter would not perform the rituals, he gave up the idea.

A few years later, Hua found an easier job with regular days off, and we were able to spend more time visiting each other. She told me that she continued to be troubled by evil spirits although she knew how to pray to stop them from playing havoc with her life. When she agreed to deal the spirits, we set a date for that purpose. I enlisted the help of a good friend to fast and pray with me about the matter.

On the appointed day and time, we started with hymns of praise and thanksgiving. Then we waited on the Holy Spirit to lead Hua back to her early years, to the time where she had sinned or done something to let the spirits into her life. She confessed her sins one by one, as she recalled those instances. After more than an hour of prayer and praise, and confession, she felt that the spirits had less control over her. However, I knew in my spirit that she had not been fully released, and that she would need more prayer and fasting for full release. And so we agreed to meet another time.

A few weeks later, on the appointed day, we met again and this time we led Hua through a long period of prayer, letting Holy Spirit lead her to remember anything else in her life that had opened the door for the evil spirits to enter her. Then she suddenly recalled something she had done when she was 12 years old. At that time, she



had been very concerned at the poverty her family was facing, and that her mother had to work very hard to provide for the family. She wished she could do something to alleviate their poverty. She heard of an old woman up in the mountain who had magical powers to help people. She went to the old woman's village, and asked to be taught the magic. The woman's reluctance did not dissuade her. Since she persisted, the woman taught her to chant the magic words. She stayed with the woman, learning all the magic that the woman was willing to reveal to her. For several years, she would worship the idols daily and make those chants in the hope that they would be free from poverty. As those memories flooded back into her mind, I asked her if she saw anything that she needed to confess. Her response was, "Yes." Then she confessed her sin to the Lord, and announced that she would have nothing to do with those spirits. Immediately, as we laid our hands on her, she saw a black cloud lift through her head, and she was free. And she has been free ever since.

Our God is the Almighty El Shaddai and Jehovah Saboath (Lord of Hosts); all spirits have to bow to him. As his children, we live under his care and protection, and also have the authority in the name of Jesus Christ to destroy strongholds and rescue the oppressed. Amen.

### **God the provider**

Jehovah Jireh (God who provides) delights to show his love to His children. And I have experienced his love and gifts again and again.

When we were building our house in the village in PNG, the expenses were high, but my support was low. Fortunately, Liisa's sending organisation was willing pay the bills upfront for the housing materials, and I was able to repay them for my share of the costs month by month when I received my monthly support.

I had joined WBT Australia as there was no WBT office in Singapore in 1977. Not realising that WBT Australia had a rule that all members had to raise at least 80% of their support before they were sent out to the field, I went for linguistics training in Sydney without raising any support, with just enough funds to last the year. In order to save expenses, I went straight from Sydney to the field orientation

course in PNG. There, I met Liisa and decided to begin work straight away. This meant that I did not return to Singapore, and therefore had no opportunity to canvass for an increase in my financial support. However, I had been taught in Bible College that one needed to live by faith in the Lord. Looking to the Lord and praying to him was the best course of action.

Colleagues in WBT Australia were kind enough to channel support from individuals and churches to me. So, my “bread and butter” was taken care of for the first few years in PNG. I wrote to thank these supporters, and in that way gained several friends and supporters from that country.

After a WBT office was established in Singapore in 1980, the Singapore director liaised with my home church, Fairfield Methodist Church, and the leadership generously increased my support to the needed 80%. Since then, my home church has been my main supporter financially, spiritually and socially.

God also provided me with prayer supporters. Mrs Eileen Kuhn was one of my most active prayer supporters, and her regular letters and notes were a great boost to me. One of her notes to me, in her inimitable way:

*“WOW.. O.K. I’m praying, get your nets ready for the answers. And keep me updated. You are a busy gal for heavenly good. I’m an ‘old lady’ whose job description is prayer. So I’m on your team, like it or not! Have you noticed the rise in prayer needs? I try to keep up with them but they seem to multiply by the hour. GOD IS AT WORK!! Praise His Holy Name! Keep up the good work and watch out for miracles!! Love you.”*

I knew that I could also count on my prayer partners from my church in Singapore and elsewhere to pray for me. My church has a system of “missionary care partners” – members who sign up to support specific missionaries sent out by the church in prayer, by writing to them and providing encouragement. I’m very thankful for the couples, Trevor and San San, Yew Hock and Siew Yeam, for their care and support through many years. I felt blessed by their encouragement and sharing. There were also many friends in Singapore and from the world over who were praying for our work. Together with Liisa’s supporters

and friends, we were really blessed by a great host of God's people cheering us on by their prayers. Whatever we were able to accomplish was borne on the wings of the prayers of God's faithful people who journeyed with us in our ministry.

### **My later homes**

God provided me with homes wherever I lived and served. In my second field of service, after a few years of living in a rented apartment in the city, many people urged me to purchase an apartment so I would be able to get a residence permit. Despite months of pouring over advertisements, visiting housing agents, even going to a huge housing estate exposition, and viewing several properties, I could not find a suitable unit for sale. Some units were too old or too far away from my friends, who wished me to live close by.

After several viewings, disappointment and tiredness ensued. I finally turned to our heavenly Father to completely take over the whole undertaking. One morning, after visiting another apartment, I realised that although I had asked for guidance from the Lord, I had not verbalised my specifications. So, in my time of meditation, I laid out a few: (i) preferably in the same block where I was already residing; (ii) liveable, so that I would not need to spend time to clean or renovate it; and (iii) that the toilet-cum-bathroom would be a remodelled one which incorporated the washbasin in the bathroom. Having said that prayer, I left it to the Lord.

A few days later, during the lunch hour, I went to the housing agent nearby to look at an advertisement for another apartment for a friend. On seeing me, the agent, who had been bringing me around to see other apartments, excitedly told me that he had a lovely apartment just right for me. At my look of scepticism, he said, "It's true. You will love the place. I went to have a look." It was reported to him just that very morning, and he had not yet put up the listing. Instead, he had been calling my home phone the whole morning! The owner of the apartment later told me that they had put up their place for sale that morning, just to try their luck. They didn't expect the sale to go through so fast!

That evening, I went to see the apartment, which was in the same block as my rented flat. I was stunned as I stood at the door. It was very tastefully done up as the wife was an interior decorator. They had used the best quality materials and had lived in it for only six months. I felt that it was too luxurious for me. But the bathroom confirmed that this apartment was from my loving heavenly Father to me. It was a converted bathroom incorporating the washbasin, just as I had asked for! The Lord had graciously met all the criteria I listed in my prayer. A good friend and supporter kindly provided the funds for the purchase. So, I now had a lovely apartment with most of the bedroom windows facing south, so it was nice and warm in winter. There was also a big guest room so that I could house visitors and colleagues who needed a room while in transit. Praise the Lord for his provision!

Being the owner of an apartment, I was able apply for a yearly residence permit instead of having to leave the country every six months to apply for another visa to re-enter the country. In the ensuing years, the residence permit was extended to two years, and eventually three years!

God also provided me with a home in Singapore – twice! In 1985-6, my mother was in a nursing home. But she was unhappy there and wanted a home of her own. Although she had diabetes and had suffered a minor stroke, she was able to live by herself. So, while on furlough in 1986, I decided to buy a flat for my mother, which would also be a place to store my things. I found the cheapest 2-bedroom public housing flat on the market, in an old estate, Tanglin Halt. With my limited funds, all I could afford was the small down payment, but my siblings helped to make the remaining payments since my mother was living there. With help from friends and siblings, I had it renovated. After it was ready, my mother moved in and spent her last years there until she passed away in January 1990.

After my mother passed away, the empty flat was rented out to foreign students of SBC who were in Singapore with their families, as I was still living overseas. It was a blessing for them, as I kept the rent low. With that income, I was able to help others at home and those I had met on the field. The provision of the flat was a blessing to me, my mother, and many others.

However, the story does not end there. In 2015, the Housing Development Board announced that the old flats in Tanglin Halt, including mine, would be torn down, and that the owners of the old flats would be provided with new flats nearby. In Singapore, residents of such flats which have been selected for redevelopment are jokingly said to have won the lottery. Not only would the affected residents receive a new flat, but also sufficient grants to renovate the replacement flat. And so, in 2019, I moved to a brand new flat closer to town, next to a linear park, and just a few minutes' walk to the nearest MRT (metro) station.

As I reflect on my housing journey from 1986 to 2019, I can see the Lord's hand in the process. My mother lived comfortably in the Tanglin Halt flat in her last few years, a succession of SBC students and their families were blessed for close to 27 years, and now I have been provided with a new flat in a lovely location in my retirement. I thank and praise the Lord! He orchestrated it for me! I couldn't have seen the future, but he did.

In these more than 45 years, no matter where I was, in whatever circumstances, God was in the midst of it all. He was the unseen Protector, the Provider, the Orchestra Master, the Healer, the Helper... Without his presence and guidance all way, life for me would have been so very different.

This poem reflects my thoughts on our Lord.

迈行一路四十载    *Treading on the road of 40 years,*  
一步一步行过来    *Step by step I ventured on.*  
曲崎上下向前行    *Twisted bends, ups and downs, I stepped ahead.*  
足下沙尘石头尖    *With sand and sharp stones under my feet,*  
仍有慈父在身旁    *Merciful Father constantly with me.*  
酸甜苦辣他知晓    *He knows the sour, the sweet, the bitter and the fiery.*

## Chapter 8

### Looking Back



Let me end with these poems which reflect the years of walking with the Lord, or maybe I should say, how the Lord has walked me through life. He planned my life from the beginning – from my birth, or even before my birth. He has accomplished his plans for me, using the gifts that he has gifted to me, whether in the love of languages and my fascination with them, love of the outdoors, love for God’s Word, and my great interest in cultures and peoples.

I went out as a young woman, with just a background in teaching, with hardly any experience in missions and Bible translation. And in the ensuing years, people have taught and mentored me, cooperated with me, been models for me, in life and work. And then, after many years, I had the privilege to mentor younger colleagues, teaching them and been taught, and the cycle of learning goes on.

Officially I am a retired member of Wycliffe Singapore, and in March this year I did the last checking of a translated epistle for a team. Regretfully, because of age and some health issues, I have to stop this work, and let my younger colleagues carry on. God will have His eye on His work. It’s not mine, but his.

The Lord brought many people into my life, and I was surrounded by a “cloud of witnesses” – supporters in prayer and in practical ways, those who trained me, those I trained, those who shared their lives, and those who partnered with me in translating God’s Word for many languages. Without their obedience in giving themselves to God, all that I’ve shared in my memoirs would not have happened. I praise God for them. And I praise God for himself. He is the Almighty God; he made it all come to pass.

### ***My Years with the Lord***

***(written at age 61)***

*Threescore and ten the Bible says,  
the years that man on earth shall stay.  
And yet for those who stronger be  
ten years, or more, maybe.*

*My years, how many more? I count.  
Lo, only nine more years be found.  
Time enough to love Him still,  
and serve him more till I be still.*

*I know not what the years will bring,  
but this I know that He is king;  
of all my life and all my things;  
of all my thoughts and my being.*

*He knows the way ahead for me,  
I know not, but what need there be?  
Each pathway he does well prepare  
for me to walk and not despair.*

*Nine years and more, if He does please.  
No other lord, but Him I need.  
Faith to trust him still I plead.  
Grace to live, till His face I see.*

***Reflection on My 70th Birthday***

*Ah, seventy years the Lord did give,  
Abounding in his love and grace,  
Steps treaded and moments spent,  
His works did me amaze.*

*More years to live before him?  
I do not know, yet trust him still,  
To tread the paths he does lead,  
Savour each moment he will give.*

*My Lord, he knows the way,  
The best and good, with some woes.  
His loving hands still I hold  
'til the day this world I let go.*

人生七十到此时	<i>Life has reached 70.</i>
回忆顾前唯有主	<i>Reflecting on the past, and the future, there is only God.</i>
每步每刻祂引领	<i>He leads each moment, each minute,</i>
不问不疑只有信	<i>not doubting, not querying, just in trust.</i>
若有人生还七十	<i>If there be another 70 years to live,</i>
定系专心奉一主	<i>I will steadfastly serve the same Lord.</i>





Called by God to serve in missions, Poh San and her teammate, Liisa, translated the New Testament for the Mauwake people of Papua New Guinea. They were adopted into a village family and fondly known as “those two” while living among the Mauwake for over 20 years. Poh San shares candidly about the joys and challenges of living and working cross-culturally, not just with the Mauwake, but also the many other nationalities on the field.

After 45 years of ministry with Wycliffe Bible Translators, she testifies that she was truly *Called by Grace, Led by Grace*.



ISBN 978-981-18-7540-3



9 789811 875403 >

Cover: Road in Papua New Guinea.

Back cover: Dedication of the Mauwake New Testament.