



And the Word Came—by Video

by David Ramsdale

(Adapted and updated from the original article that appeared in *Beyond*, Vol. 25 no. 6, November 1997)

With the average translation project taking about 12 years, every translator clings to the hope that when God's Word is finally in a new language the people will immediately accept it. Sadly, sometimes they don't.

In 1957 Joy McCarthy began to live among the Kanite (con-nee-tay) people of Papua New Guinea. Two years later Gwen Gibson joined her. For nearly 25 years Joy and Gwen studied the intricacies of the Kanite language and culture. Little by little they "carved" God's Word into this difficult language. But time and again they were frustrated by the Kanites' lack of interest in what they were doing. As time wore on, encroaching materialism, brought on by the relative prosperity of the region, seemed to distract the people more and more.

Still, the women kept on and finally were ready to dedicate the New Testament in the Kanite language. But, as Joy and Gwen recall it, "The dedication day turned out to be the worst day of our lives." There was little interest in the Book they offered.

A determined Joy and Gwen trekked over the surrounding hills with the Kanite New Testaments for six months promoting Scripture use. But the results were disappointing.

During this difficult time, a request came from a nearby related-language group for the New Testament to be translated into their language, Inoke (ee-no-kay). With a strong established church, maybe the Inoke would respond better, Joy and Gwen thought. So they readily agreed. In 1982, they tackled the Inoke language. This project moved more quickly than the first with the aid of a computer, several translation helpers and their past experience with the Kanite. Over 3,000 people learned to read.

After 11 years, on April 22, 1993, the Inoke New Testament was dedicated. However, the response to the New Testament was again less than enthusiastic. Only 32 New Testaments sold on the dedication day. If anything, the Inoke dedication was even more discouraging than the Kanite dedication had been.

Still, Gwen and Joy would not give up. Showing the perseverance that marks their lives, they decided in 1996 to write a script to dub onto the Genesis Project's Luke video in both Inoke and Kanite, and before long they were ready for the first showings. Joy and Gwen rented a utility truck with a camper shell and set out for Inoke villages that could be reached by road.

Their first trip lasted six days. "The response was great!" says Gwen. "No buildings were large enough to hold the crowds, so we showed the video outdoors under a full moon. At an altitude of 6,000 feet the

nights were very cold. Still, 200 to 500 people came each night and sat perfectly still for two and a half hours as they watched! The sound system was excellent. Even people who stayed in their village houses could hear everything. The video sold them on the Inoke New Testament.”

Shortly after this trip, Kanite-speaking friends came to Gwen and Joy’s home in Ukarumpa (SIL’s linguistics center in Papua New Guinea) to view the Luke video. Joy tells it this way: “We had the delight of seeing the reaction of a Kanite friend and his wife as they sat on the edge of their seats with eyes glued to the screen. ‘Oh, everyone should see this! You must bring it to our villages as soon as the roads are dry enough,’ the husband said. Tears streamed down his wife’s face as she watched Jesus’ suffering. ‘He did it for our sins! We didn’t know if it was really true, so we haven’t been following Jesus’ talk, but now that I see and hear it, we must follow him,’ she said.”

When the videos became available, the demand for viewing them was great. Crowds of both Kanite and Inoke speakers sat under the stars to view the message of the gospel. Many had no jackets, but despite the cold, they watched intently, sometimes returning to their homes late into the night.

In late November and the first half of December of 1996, Joy and Gwen traveled to Lae, the provincial capital, with the videos and a supply of New Testaments. There they were introduced to Paul, a man Joy remembered as a four-year-old boy from her Kanite village. Paul, thrilled with their purpose in coming, arranged for showings and escorted them each night to the different viewing sites. Kanite speakers from all over the city brought their friends and coworkers.

The video sparked interest in reading the New Testament. Gwen recounts, “The trip was a marvelous display of God’s goodness. The people asked us to return so that the video could be shown again in larger groups.”

In 1997 two pastors, Thomas in Kanite and Fred in Inoke, were given video projectors and other equipment so they could show the videos in remote areas. A team of 20 young people came from Canada to train these men to use the equipment and accompanied them on treks to show the videos to thousands of people. The response was electric as the gospel message became real through the visual medium. Usually crowds were in tears and wailing during the crucifixion scene. In the years since, these two pastors have continued to show the video in large conferences with good results.

Joy could then say, after years of disappointment, “For me it has felt like the culmination of many years to know some are hearing the message clearly for the first time. And others understand better because of the Luke video.”

Gwen adds, “To hear comments such as ‘Now I have seen it with my own eyes and heard it in my own language’ thrills me. What can I say? It’s wonderful,” Gwen added.

Sometimes it takes a while for God’s Word to work in hearts. For 39 years Joy McCarthy and Gwen Gibson labored with tears. Now, with the help of multimedia tools, the time of rejoicing came. The words of Psalm 126:5-6 are true. “Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him.”
