

Tribute to David R. Lithgow 1928-1994

David Roy Lithgow was born in Toowoomba, Queensland, on the 20th of November, 1928, and died on the 26th of October, 1994, after a long, but triumphant, bout with cancer. From that first diagnosis in 1978 until his death, he "valued each day as a special gift from God," and, some would say, accomplished more in those final years than many do in a lifetime. For 32 years, he and his wife Daphne served in Papua New Guinea with the Summer Institute of Linguistics and her sister organization Wycliffe Bible Translators, where he was involved in the translation of the New Testament in the Muyuw language (1964-1978), Dobu Revision (1972-1986), Bunama (1975-1991), and Auhelawa (1983-present). During that time he helped survey many remote areas for the first time linguistically, and produced dozens of technical linguistic papers.

Before joining SIL in 1962, David had completed his medical degree in 1957. He and his new bride Daphne served for two years in Fiji at the Methodist Mission Hospital in Ba, Viti Levu, where they learned the Hindustani language.

Arriving in the Territory of Papua and New Guinea in 1963, David was involved in extensive linguistic survey work with Phil Staalsen and other researchers, and served as group doctor for the fledgling SIL organization. A pattern was set, and for over three decades he continued to do intensive linguistic research and areal studies, training others in linguistic and translation skills, while utilizing his skills as a medical doctor and Christian leader in unstinting service to both Papua New Guineans and expatriates. Completing the first draft of the Muyuw New Testament in 1972, the Lithgows immediately began helping the Bible Society with the Dobu revision, while completing the details of bringing the Muyuw translation to print. At the same time, David took on other responsibilities as Regional Director for SIL in Milne Bay. In 1975 began assisting in yet another language, Bunama.

Always a prolific writer, it was during this period that he wrote his broadly based surveys on the Papuan Tip Austronesian languages which were included in Wurm's (1976) monumental cooperative study of PNG languages. David presented papers at numerous Austronesian conferences, and has published many linguistic studies on the Austronesian languages of the Milne Bay region. In the midst of his linguistic writing and translation work he also published *Mollie at Home*, in 1980, and *Pioneering in Queensland: From the Diaries of Dora Alice Lithgow (1896-1953)* in 1981. Both were biographical accounts of his mother and her family.

After completing their earlier translations, he and Daphne did many follow-up boat patrols to both the Woodlark (Muyuw) and Dobu-speaking areas, encouraging the use of translated scriptures in the churches and promoting vernacular literacy in the communities.

My involvement with David is perhaps illustrative of his interaction with others. Returning to the USA in 1969 after doing field work on the Suau language of Milne Bay under the auspices of a grant from the East-West Centre, Hawaii, I corresponded with David for many years as each of us prepared various manuscripts for publication and discussed the relationships among the Papuan Tip languages. This mentoring process was one which David replicated many times over with young scholars around the world. We did not meet in person, however, until 1984, when Dr. Lithgow helped my wife and I settle in our present language allocation with the Buhutu people in Milne Bay Province.

Fittingly, at the end of his career, before the final cancer forced his return to Queensland, he held the position of Translation Coordinator for the PNG branch of SIL from 1991 to 1993, serving approximately 185 active field programmes in PNG in that role. It was a role that was close to his heart. To him, linguistics was a fascinating tool; translation was the heart of his work. For over thirty years he served and trained numerous mother tongue colleagues in translation, modeling for them the principles of the Book he was translating. His heritage can be seen in strong leadership roles which they now hold in the churches and communities of their own language groups.

Drawing from his diaries, a biography of David Lithgow's life is now in preparation by Lynnette Oates.

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