

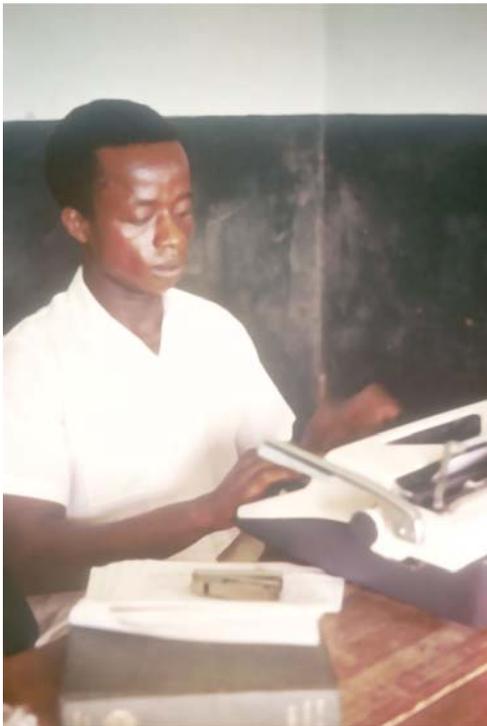
"THERE IS NO REST IN THE MIDDLE OF A JOURNEY"

(African Proverb)

As spring 1974 drew near, we became painfully aware that this was the end of the three-year period which we had set ourselves as a goal for the triple translation project. It was the time we had originally told the supporting church in Switzerland it would take, and for which they had pledged their support. However, we were nowhere near the end of the project! Would they understand our situation and continue with their gifts?

True, we had 'lost' practically the whole first year of the project by laying the ground-work: contacting the churches, settling the orthographies for the other two dialects, trying to get the team together. And the following half year, while we were training the team, had not been very productive either. So we really could only look back on one and a half years' steady translation work. Yet this time had been so extremely intensive that the consequences healthwise were bound to show up sooner or later. Work started at 7 o'clock, but when Paul was working

along with Justin it would frequently happen that Justin, at 10 or 11 o'clock at night, would say to Paul: "Let's just start the next chapter..."



William Akichi, Ikwo typist

Justin had left us at the end of 1973, after having been one full year with us, to go to study architecture at the University in Enugu. We could not understand his decision at first and felt he had deserted us, although he promised to come back and help us during all his holidays. Much later, we could thank the Lord for this 'loss' - He knew the limits of Paul's strength. Paul could not have gone on working as hard as he had been.

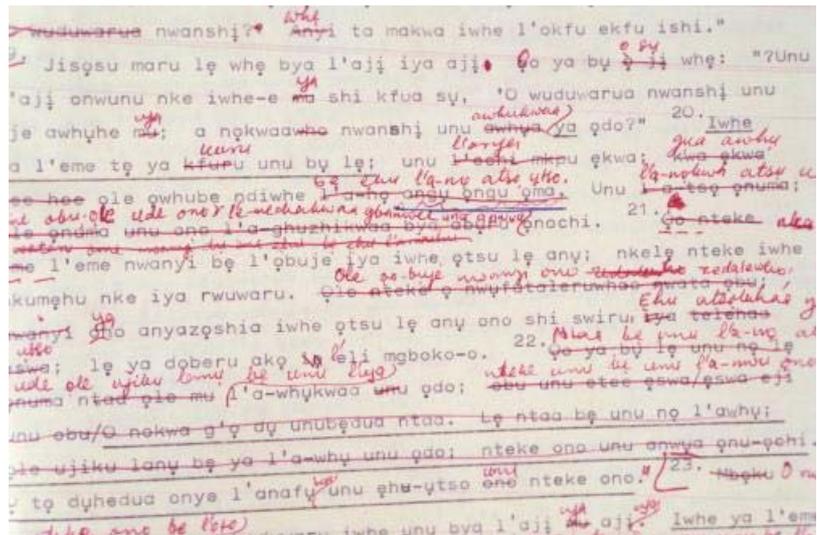
It was also the Lord's way of teaching us to give more attention to the other members of our team. They often felt neglected, unloved, accepted for their work only, as there was so little time for social and personal interaction.

Some had been jealous of Samuel, as indeed he had always had a special place in our hearts, having been the first, then lost in the war, much prayed for and then found again. "You always treat him as your firstborn son and don't care for us others so much," had been a frequent complaint.

Some had been jealous of Justin, because Paul spent so much time translating with him. And indeed he was the ideal translator, linguistically gifted, imaginative, reliable, hard-working. Furthermore it was he who - through working over the book of Romans - had found the truth that his church had never taught him before: that he was saved by faith alone.

Some were jealous of John, because we gave him so much attention, love and care. To us, it seemed the least we could do. His earthly family had more or less deserted him.

What weighed us down most was to realize that we had misjudged the enormity of the task and miscalculated the timing. Not so much for the first translation draft itself, but for the tedious jobs of re-reading, re-checking, cross-checking, re-working and re-changing verses etc. We seemed to never see an end. There were not only first drafts, but also second and third, and for certain books even fourth drafts! This was because of the cross-fertilization from the two other dialects which proved to be an unsurpassable advantage, but also a never-ending process.



this is how a manuscript looked that the typist had to decipher and type

Yet the overall workload weighed too heavily on Paul. There were the long hours of sitting behind the table, bent over books and manuscripts, almost always with a different translators. There was the unfinished and still substantial translation task and re-checking job to be completed. There were the recurrent tensions and strains in relationships with the co-workers, sometimes caused by differences of opinion in translating, partly due to Paul's attempts to move them away from literalism, but most frequently caused by their different attitudes to finance and work habits.

There were also some mounting pressures from some government officials: first came the request that we should submit a monthly report of all our activities and publications to the district officer. After some time we were also asked not to use our radio transmitter and receiver any more. This hurt us especially, because it meant no more contact with our headquarters, and no more weekly contact with our two children 400 miles away. Why should this happen to only us in our state, and to none of the other teams in Nigeria?

"Isn't it extraordinarily ironic," mused Paul, "that we are being accused of just the opposite of what SIL in South America is! There we are allegedly destroying the indigenous cultures and here some political party is mad because, by our work, we are preserving the culture!"

After a jeep-load of policemen and soldiers had paid us a visit to make sure we weren't using our radio any more, it became clear to us that our time in Echara would soon come to an end. Even the church was planning to restore the former medical clinic, and was just waiting for us to vacate the buildings. We concluded that the Lord was telling us it was time to move on.

But where to? With an extended household of about 15 people? There was only one place in Nigeria which attracted us: Jos, where our children went to school and which was the site of our new SIL headquarters. The additional luxuries there, like electricity and running water, printing facilities and a cool, healthy climate, would be more than welcome. But would our co-workers be willing to come with us so far from their home areas? And where in Jos could we find a suitable place to live and work for so many people?

All these pressures and questions slowly affected Paul's health. Pains in his chest occurred more and more frequently and I remember many nights when he woke me up and said:

"Inge, you have to pray for me again, I don't know if I will make it to the morning..."

Having no electric lights, we would just lie in the dark, praying and quoting Bible verses to each other. I would lay my hand on his chest and claim all the promises which the Holy Spirit would bring to my memory. And it nearly broke my heart, too, when I heard Paul pray:

"Lord, just keep me going until the translation is finished: let me live until our translators don't need me any more, then you can take me away..."

Oh no, I thought, the children and I need him much longer! "Lord, please heal him completely and for good!"

Although our short furlough was planned to start in just a few months, we felt we had to get away for a couple of weeks and also consult one of our mission doctor



Translator Elias Uguru also helped with polycopying the literacy booklets

friends. A two days' journey to the eastern border of Nigeria brought us high up to the Gofel Mountains, on the cool Mambila plateau. There at 5500 ft. we found the needed rest, distance from our work and fellowship with other Christians. We visited two of our other translation teams and shared in their joys and discouragements. One team, two single ladies, had just recently lost their home in a fire that had swept through the whole village, but worse than losing their home was losing all their language material, including a first draft of Mark's Gospel.

On our way home, down the hairpin bends of the Mambila plateau, we were again amazed by the many wrecks rusting away at the side of the dangerous road. Here and there the inscriptions on the front or the back of a truck: 'God's Will' or 'Who knows tomorrow?' testified to the truck owner's need for security. On a straight piece of road, a number of miles further down, we experienced a tangible sign of how much we needed the protection of the Lord's hand over us and our old Landrover. Paul suddenly cried out:

"The brakes don't work any more, nor the clutch!" Quickly looking out of the window, I shouted back through the noise of the engine, aghast:

"The back wheel is sticking out, and the axle, too!" There was nothing we could do but let the car run until it came to a standstill, fortunately on a stretch of flat road...

After the initial shock, we all climbed out, truly thankful that this had not happened while we were driving down the steep mountain slopes! But what now, stuck in the middle of nowhere, 100 miles away from the nearest town and not even a village in sight?

"I doubt very much that I can fix this," Paul said, "but the first thing we want to do is pray, to thank the Lord for having saved our lives and to ask Him to take care of our next step."

We never uttered this prayer aloud, for while he was still speaking, a Landrover approached us fast, trailing behind a huge cloud of dust. It stopped right behind us - a friendly young white man and some Nigerian companions got out.

"Isn't it good that I have a mechanic with me," he exclaimed when he saw our predicament. He presented himself as an Italian engineer. With his mechanic he worked on that wheel and axle - in vain. There was no other solution but for Paul to go with them to the next town, and for me to stay and wait with the children.

Time passed slowly - not many people journeyed this way. The heat was unbearable, there were only scanty bushes along the road, and for fear of snakes we did not dare step into the bush to look for more shade. After 4 or 5 hours, the sun began to set and in the sudden African twilight, the fascinating orchestra of the frogs, toads and crickets started and swelled. I couldn't enjoy it for long: the enervating buzzing of dozens of mosquitoes around my ears brought me to my feet, for I remembered that we had nothing to protect us. I called the girls, and

together we scrambled into the Landrover and closed all the windows. We had already eaten our little snack and the girls lay down on the padded board over the luggage that Daddy had constructed for them. But sleep would not come, in spite of all their tiredness. The car still radiated the heat of the day and the air got stuffier every moment. They asked for the windows to be opened. I explained why this wasn't possible. They cried. I explained more. They cried more. The only thing that mattered for them was air, breeze and coolness. Slowly I relaxed. Was I afraid of mosquitoes? Of unknown forms of malaria? Was not the God who had protected us from an accident greater than these thousands of insects? I also remembered an incident which a friend had recently described in a letter. She had taken the statement of Genesis 1:28 literally: that man was being created to have dominion over all the animal world, and was being commanded to do so. I opened the windows as far as they would go, I prayed to the Lord who had created the tiny mosquitos, asking for protection, and I commanded those insects not to touch us at all! The flow of tears stopped, the cool air coming in was soothing, and sleep overcame the girls. But the buzzing of the mosquitos continued more persistently than ever, it seemed to me. I could see hordes of them in the dim moonlight - but I did not mind. My trust was in the Lord and my heart was at peace. Hours later, when I could finally put the girls into a bed, I marvelled with a thankful heart that I could not detect a single mosquito bite on their skin, nor on mine...

It was past ten o'clock when I heard the welcome noise of a motor in the distance. It was a friend from a mission in the next town, with Paul, coming to fetch us. Soon our luggage and our sleeping girls were transferred to his car and we could marvel together about the love and leading of the Lord.

"Do you know, Inge, that Italian fellow was a Christian! I could hardly believe it. He was so full of joy. He had only recently had a personal experience with the Lord. A Christian from Italy, of all places!"

"And do you know, Paul, that his was the only vehicle that travelled that road for the rest of the day? Just think of it: if he had passed five minutes earlier we would still be sitting there!"

This whole experience was the culmination of our restful holidays: it was the voice of the Lord telling us: "Don't you worry, I am in control. Whatever your problems, accidents, pressures, questions, mistakes, illnesses, etc., I have a plan. I will bring you to the end of this project. Haven't you just seen the proof of my love and my care and my planning? Continue to work and trust me."

Our pace of work did slow down a little bit after our vacation, as the doctor had prescribed, but there were still so many plans to be made and decisions to be settled, before we could go on furlough at the beginning of May. Each co-worker would have to know exactly what was expected of him in those three months of our absence. These arrangements had to be written down in detail, describing the stages for each Bible book for each dialect. A letter from our director in Jos gave

us extra drive and joy: we had been offered the large children's home to rent in Jos the following year, as all SIL families with children were either on furlough or residing in Jos themselves!

And there was even more good news: another SIL team, Keir and Gillian Hansford, would be willing and happy to come and live in our house during our absence, to be available for any counsel or help. This would be ideal.

We left for Jos at the end of April. How thankful I was! From now on, no more separation from the children for a long while. No more waiting for letters that took such a long time to arrive. After furlough, I would be able to share their joys and worries every day, and yet be able to help with the work. True, we were looking forward to three restful months in Switzerland - but we were looking beyond that, longing to finish the New Testament. We were still 'in the middle of the journey', and there could not be too much of a rest until it was completed.