

# JAARS **SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT**

Speaker  
**George Hart**

Broadcast Date  
**October 5, 2008**

Interviewer  
**Arthur Lightbody**

Primary Topic(s)  
**The Chayahuitas of Peru**

Other Topics  
**Language learning, translation work, medical work, introducing the gospel through music**

Location Discussed  
**Peru**

People Group (if named)  
**Chayahuita**

**Announcer:**

Welcome to *Speeding the Word*, coming to you from the JAARS Center in Waxhaw, North Carolina, where JAARS speeds Bible translation for all people. And now our host Arthur Lightbody.

**Lightbody:**

It's my pleasure to talk to George Hart today. How are you, George?

**Hart:**

I'm doing fine.

**Arthur:**

This is our first time talking with you, and we're going to talk about the Chayahuita people in a minute, but it has been great getting acquainted with you here at JAARS. I understand you have made a recent trip to Peru. We're going to talk about that in a minute, but I'm very interested in your background. Were you in the Army, or the Air Force?

**Hart:**

In the Army Air Force, the original Army Air Force.

**Lightbody:**

That was in World War II, right? And you were a pilot? Where did you fly?

**Hart:**

I flew over "The Hump."

**Lightbody:**

That's a famous name—but where is it, for those who have forgotten?

**Hart:**

From northeastern India, you fly over the top of Burma and over the Himalayan Mountains and end up in Kunming, China.

**Lightbody:**

That gave you a taste of flying? And you wanted to be a pilot in missions—is that true?

**Hart:**

No, that was just my experience. I thought perhaps I could use that experience to help in the effort of Bible translation.

**Lightbody:**

So you went and pursued that for a while, is that right?

**Hart:**

I was taking my original [college] courses—I wanted to graduate from Wheaton and do missionary work.

**Lightbody:**

So then you did switch to focus on the Bible, and you gave up that idea of flying.

**Hart:**

Yes. I was not a mechanic, and Wycliffe pilots have to be mechanics to fix their airplanes.

**Lightbody:**

After Wheaton you had to get linguistic training. So where did you go for that, George?

**Hart:**

I attended the University of Oklahoma in Norman, Oklahoma, at the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

**Lightbody:**

That was the early 1950s then, and you went down to Peru—you were married to Helen by the time you got there, is that right?

**Hart:**

Helen was teaching each summer, and she was my first grammar teacher, so I decided I needed more grammar.

**Lightbody:**

You brought your grammar with you—so she was an expert linguist.

**Hart:**

Yes, she was.

**Lightbody:**

We can tell our listeners that your dear wife, Helen, passed away two years ago, so we're talking to George. You went to work in Peru with what group of people?

**Hart:**

With the Chayahuita Indians.

**Lightbody:**

Where do they live?

**Hart:**

They live in the edge of the jungle, along the foothills on the eastern side of the Andes Mountains.

**Lightbody:**

Over on the Brazil side of Peru, getting closer to the jungle, I imagine. How many people were there that spoke Chayahuita?

**Hart:**

Nobody knew, because they had never been studied by anyone. Nobody knew what area they lived in, how many of them were, what their language was like. That was all unknown.

**Lightbody:**

So you were the first outsiders to go there?

**Hart:**

From Wycliffe, yes.

**Lightbody:**

Tell us about those early years. How did you learn the language? Did your skills come to fruition there?

**Hart:**

You learn it monolingually, just like a child does.

**Lightbody:**

Just speaking it. And they didn't speak Spanish, is that right?

**Hart:**

Very few of them, and they didn't understand Spanish very well.

**Lightbody:**

What did they do to make a living? How did they survive out there?

**Hart:**

The original crop which they grew was wild rubber. When we first went there, we helped them with selling their wild rubber.

**Lightbody:**

So they sold that for cash to buy other food and clothing. What kind of foods did they harvest and eat themselves?

**Hart:**

They grew bananas, manioc, corn and other jungle plants.

**Lightbody:**

Did they do any hunting?

**Hart:**

Yes. It was the only way they got their meat.

**Lightbody:**

What kind of meat? What kind of animals?

**Hart:**

They have deer, wild pig and tapir.

**Lightbody:**

Did they get them by spears, or did they have guns?

**Hart:**

They used blowguns—using small darts with poison that stunned the birds or animals. They also had some old rifles, the kind of rifles that were used in the Civil War.

**Lightbody:**

Muzzle-loader, single shots?

**Hart:**

Right—and they often made their own shells.

**Lightbody:**

How did you let them know that you were there to translate the Bible? Were they interested in that?

**Hart:**

No. It took them a long time to figure out why on earth were we there. We didn't sell anything. We didn't buy anything, and they couldn't figure out why we had come.

**Lightbody:**

They weren't people that read, is that right?

**Hart:**

No. They had nothing to read.

**Lightbody:**

So how did you first start to do the very first translation? How did that come about? Did someone come forward to help you?

**Hart:**

No. We just went down and visited, just as their friends. And we learned to talk with them.

**Lightbody:**

How long did it take you before the first Bible verses were translated? You got there in 1956.

**Hart:**

First of all, you have to learn enough of the language so you can communicate with them and you can understand enough of their words to carry out a conversation.

**Lightbody:**

So how did they read that first translation when you first gave it to them? Did you or your wife or somebody else help teach them to read?

**Hart:**

They had to be taught everything. They didn't even have an alphabet. We had to start by figuring out what the alphabet was, what the letters in the language would be, and then deciding what sounds to use for each letter. It took at least 10 years, I think, before we could really carry on a good conversation and explain ourselves.

Our medical work was one of the most significant things. Most of them had never seen a doctor in their life. When there were epidemics of measles or things like that, they would come to us for medicines. Very early, during the second time we were out, they had a measles epidemic—they actually died from pneumonia. The medicine was simply penicillin injections. I spent three months that fall traveling up river one day and down river the next, alternating the shots—it was a two-shot penicillin treatment.

**Lightbody:**

A lot of our listeners may not know why it takes so long to do Bible translation. Here we are finding out why. The people had real needs that you had to minister to in those early days. You spent a lot of time on the medical needs, and you were ministering in that way. There were spiritual needs, too, and of course that's why you had come. You were telling me earlier today the way they would revere the saints. It was like a worship thing they had in their culture—a blended culture—with some religion they had taken from here and there. What were doing? Tell us about that.

**Hart:**

They had no creator God. Their ideas about God and what He was like were picked up here and there, mixed up with their shamanism. They had this story about [how] God used to be a man, lived down here on earth and the demons killed Him. They didn't like Him, so they killed Him, and He came back to life again and said, "If that's the way you're going to treat me, I'm going on up high." And He went up high, and that's all we know about Him.

**Lightbody:**

So you had some good news to tell them. How did they approach worship? I understand you were able to use music as a real bridge for the gospel. Did they have a form of music already?

**Hart:**

They had never sung at all. The women would sing Quechua lullabies they had picked up from the Quechuas.

**Lightbody:**

So they did that. But then how did you introduce Christian music? Did you write hymns with them?

**Hart:**

My wife wrote the hymns. She picked up tunes she'd heard from other tribes and some the women had sung. Because the men had never sung; I didn't think that would appeal to them at all. But when we started writing the hymns, we took a verse of Scripture and put it to music. The women loved it. But I said the men will never do that, because men just don't sing. But when they heard those songs, it was the men who surprised us the most. They loved them. That way they memorized many verses of Scripture, which we had deliberately put together to explain what the Gospel was all about.

**Lightbody:**

Then eventually many believed? Are there churches now among the Chayahuita?

**Hart:**

Yes. We started out with one church, and they tell me now that there are well over 50 churches. Every year the Chayahuita churches get together for a whole week of fellowship. Last January there were 400 Chayahuita believers who were together for a whole week, just teaching each other, learning new hymns and worshipping God.

**Lightbody:**

Are you are still working on some translation?

**Hart:**

Yes. We finished the New Testament in 1977. Their New Testament Bibles are all worn out now.

**Lightbody:**

Has part of the Old Testament has been translated?

**Hart:**

Yes. And after we finished that, and we went back, they wanted to translate 40% of the Old Testament.

**Lightbody:**

Recently you made a trip to Peru. Was that just to see people and encourage them? Why did you go back?

**Hart:**

We went back to give a last translation-consultant check of the Old Testament portions and revise the entire New Testament.

**Lightbody:**

Who was working with you on this, George?

**Hart:**

The Chayahuitas. They were the ones, because they wanted to know more about God and who He was.

**Lightbody:**

Now some of you listening might think you're too old to be involved in missions. But George, may I ask how old you are?

**Hart:**

I'm 86.

**Lightbody:**

On this last trip you flew by yourself—you changed planes in Miami and went on to Lima. Is that right? Some people might be afraid to go off on an adventure or a missionary trip, because they think it might be too difficult. But you inspire me, George, and God has blessed your ministry. Is there anything more you would like to say about God's faithfulness or anything?

**Hart:**

Nobody knew how many Chayahuitas there were. Their estimate was 5,000. I had no idea how many there were, but they live in a territory—it's a triangle with about 150 miles on the side. In that triangle, I since have found out there are 16,000 Chayahuita Indians. In that entire area, there is not a single road. If I had been told when I started out—"Here you have a territory with 16,000 people in it. It is your responsibility to see that these people hear all about the gospel. Not only that, you've got to do all of this yourself." Here's one little couple. It was impossible for any two people to do something like that. We said right there, "They are the ones who are going to have to do it, because nobody else will ever pay any attention to the Chayahuitas."

**Lightbody:**

Thank you, George, for being with us and sharing. Everybody have a great day.

**Announcer:**

We hope that you've enjoyed *Speeding the Word*. Arthur Lightbody would love to hear from you personally if you are interested in becoming part of the Bible translation movement. He welcomes your call at 1-704-843-6048. You may look us up on the Web at [www.jaars.org](http://www.jaars.org).