

JAARS **SPEEDING THE WORD TRANSCRIPT**

Speaker
Neil and Ruth Wiebe

Broadcast Date
January 4, 2009

Interviewer
Arthur Lightbody

Primary Topic(s)
Chachi and Cayapa people groups

Other Topics
Bilingual education, sharing the JESUS film and audio Scriptures

Location Discussed
Ecuador

People Group (if named)
Chachi, Cayapa

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:

We are talking today with Neil and Ruth Wiebe in Chilliwack, British Columbia, Canada, by phone. I've been aware of your work for some time—I understand last August there was a special celebration. What happened last August 17?

N. Wiebe:

The Cayapas River is in the northwest ... of Ecuador, coastal and near the Colombian border. The dedication of the Chachi Scriptures, including Genesis, Exodus and the entire New Testament translated into the Chachi language—that's a people group that numbers almost 10,000 on the northwest coast of Ecuador.

Lightbody:

While we are talking about them, I am curious—what do they do for a living? Give us a little insight into the kind of people they are.

N. Wiebe:

They live along the rivers that flow into the Cayapas River, so they are quite spread out. It is a jungle area, so there is a lot of rainfall. It is in a banana culture, but the people basically live off the land and earn money by selling jungle products or actually being involved in education, which has become a source of income for the area.

Lightbody:

Would you say many of the people know how to read, or is it a small percentage?

R. Wiebe:

I would say most of the people know how to read—they just don't have that much to read. We worked in bilingual education for 12 years. The people learned to read and write in their own language and then go on to fiscal [public] schools. Previously they'd been attending fiscal Spanish schools, and many of them got through grade two. Then they wouldn't go anymore, because that was enough to be able to barter or buy and sell at the coast. But the bilingual schools allowed them to learn to read and write in their own language and then confidentially go on to Spanish-speaking schools. Many of them now have finished high school and are attending university, Spanish-speaking university, and some have their bachelor's degrees. We are really quite proud of them and the effort they have made. We are glad the bilingual schools were successful.

Now they are in charge of their own schools. The teachers we taught were not very many, but now they say they have 100 schools under the Ministry of Education in Ecuador. They have their own administrators, and they have their own teachers they have trained, and they have their own schools. So I would say the population is educated. Their problem is they don't have books in their own language, other than what we sent out to them.

Lightbody:

We are going to talk about that major book—that Scripture portion you saw dedicated. I understand this was a process. We are talking with Neil and Ruth

Wiebe, who are Wycliffe Bible translators. They are Canadians, so they come under the auspices of Wycliffe Canada. The headquarters is located in Calgary, Alberta. We are glad to have them as guests—there are many Canadians engaged in this work. We’ve been hearing about the educational benefits that a translation program brings as they’ve learned the language, studied it and reduced it to written form. Can we go back and you tell us how long you’ve been involved in this Chachi work? Let’s start with you, Neil.

N. Wiebe:

Ruth and I arrived in Ecuador in August of 1970, after having spent eight months in Costa Rica studying Spanish. Then we went to Ecuador and met the Lindskoog family, who introduced us to the Chachi people, because John and Carrie had started the work earlier—in 1955—doing initial linguistic-literacy work and even some Bible translation. In fact they had published a Chachi-Spanish bilingual dictionary, which was a help to us in getting started, along with all the language data they had recorded. We picked up the reins from them, using those recordings, analyzing the language data, etc.

Lightbody:

Can you tell us some of the struggles [you encountered]? Was it simple to just go to an office and sit and talk with people all day? Were there things Satan threw in your way?

N. Wiebe:

One of the major hurdles was the fact we arrived there already speaking Spanish, but of course knowing nothing about the Chachi language. The Chachi people themselves are a little nucleus within the Spanish culture, so they were learning Spanish in varying degrees, but they would like to learn to practice their Spanish. So they realized at the outset we knew nothing of the language, so how could we understand them if they spoke their own language? So that was a hurdle for us—to convince them to use their language to speak to us, so we in turn could learn Chachi.

Perhaps another item we shouldn’t overlook at least is that over the years, isolation is perhaps a discouraging factor. Because in the early days, for example, mail communication by “snail mail” really was delayed being out in the jungle—receiving our mail once a month or so and having to wait equally as long to send it out. By the time you get a response you wondered what the topic was all about, as opposed to email, etc., which has developed over the years.

R. Wiebe:

You know, I don’t think of things as hurdles so much as the next adventure. Every time we went back to Quito, to our colleagues, they might say, “Okay, what adventure have you had this time?” We could really write a book. I think our attitude was very positive and exciting. I’d never thought of things as hurdles, but rather, the next challenge or adventure.

I think one of our hardships, if we want to go back to that word, was when our kids left for college and university. It was like reliving my life again. I left India at age 19 and had no family here [in Canada], except an aunt in Toronto, so it was very difficult to be without my daughters. But you know, you learn to lean on God even in the toughest times. God would give me something to pray about for Melody or Karis, our daughters, and I’d be praying and then three weeks later we’d receive a letter telling us what had happened and how they knew God had helped them through [a particular situation]. So even without email or telephone, we could see God with His hand on us, protecting us and using us and keeping us connected.

Lightbody:

Now we've heard about the faith of the Chachi. Were they always open to Scripture at first?

R. Wiebe:

I have a comment about that. Looking back, I think they thought we just went there with another project. They'd seen people that had gone to the river to get gold, and their project would fall through. Others came to do similar projects, and they would come and go, but the Chachi always stayed. I think by the end, when we actually had a "product" we could give them—they were excited to know it really had something to do with them.

There was another instance, too, when they caught on suddenly that Scripture had something to do with them. I'd drawn little caricatures, pictures, on the Sermon on the Mount. I had done them something like Charles Schultz might do Peanuts, okay, but little Chachi people—illustrated several instances in that Sermon on the Mount. We sent this out as leaflets with the written Scripture beside it in their language. Somebody said to me, "Wow, I thought the Bible was just Jewish history—and it really has something to do with us!" Because they saw themselves pictured right there in that passage.

Lightbody:

Can you tell us about one man who has a vision for discipleship?

N. Wiebe:

Mártires Tapuyo; it is an unusual name, based on the English word "martyrs." He has worked with us in Bible translation for the last dozen years while we were living outside Quito. He came there, volunteering because our other co-translators at the time had gone on to do other things. He saw this opportunity, and it was something he had always wanted to do. Near the end of our stage [in translation] we went through the training process once again. He turned out to be a very congenial person who was willing to look at options. He came committed to the cause of translation, and he had the determination to stick through to the end. That is what really kept us going.

Lightbody:

What could you see in the way he was committed to discipleship and growth? What kinds of things did you see that he was involved in?

N. Wiebe:

He came to us outside of Quito. We connected him with a local evangelical church he began attending. They were an outgoing group who took him in readily, took him under their wings and disciplined him, and he ended up becoming a leader in that congregation both in terms of music, which is rather unusual for the Chachi culture—they do use marimbas, drums, etc., but it is not normally with vocal music or even Western-style music for that matter. But he is very musically inclined and led worship services for a long time at that church.

R. Wiebe:

Mártires is planning to evangelize the Chachi tribe, and he wants to visit each community within the next two to five years. He has no funds to do this, and he has seen God provide for him, so we would love it if people could actually support him in doing this. Now he has all the tools—we've given him tools. We've also planned with him a whole program which he has been developing during the last 10 years. He goes to a community with the Chachi *JESUS* film. He shows that film, talks about

it. It usually takes two evenings. He travels by canoe—it takes six to eight hours by outboard motor or paddling. He takes his own DVD and television and a little generator.

He shows that film. He also has a boom box that we provided. We have 20 of those for 20 communities. We also have 20 packages of CDs. Now everything that is in the written Scriptures is now recorded by Mártires on these CDs. There are 35 CDs with actual Scripture. And five CDs that have 40 lessons—that is a year's worth of lessons, telling people who God is in their language. It goes from Genesis through the return of Christ. There is also a music CD which Mártires has sung [recorded]. Some are his own writing and production.

Lightbody:

We have to close—we urge people to pray God will supply Mártires' needs. We thank you for the opportunity to be with us today. God bless you.

Announcer:

We hope that you have 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.