THIRTY YEARS AGO

Posted on July 31, 2018 by Eddie

Extracts from the diary of a young and rather nervous linguist translator.
Category: Observations



In late June 1988, Sue and I (along with Dave, who was not yet two) moved into the village of DÃ©ma in central Ivory Coast. Our aim was to start learning the language and culture of the Kouya people so that we could join the Bible translation project. For the first five weeks of our time there, until July 31, I kept a diary of our experiences which you can find here. For a while, Wycliffe used the diary in orientating new missionaries - I think mainly as a guide to things that you shouldn't do. In case you don't want to read the whole thing, here are a few quotes:

Monday, June 27

The day started rather inauspiciously, good for parasites but not too good for *Homo sapiens*, I had been bitten badly by mosquitoes overnight, including a good few bites in a part of my anatomy that made the thought of sitting down for a seven-hour bus ride rather unpleasant.

Sunday, July 3

Church at nine oâ€™clock scheduled to last till eleven thirty, two and a half hours of solid Kouya is a daunting prospect. In the end things turned out somewhat differently, halfway through the service a terrific rainstorm began and water came straight in through the walls of the building, which resembles a garden shed. Sue and I, who had been given seats at the front as a mark of honour, found ourselves in the wettest part of the building.

Wednesday, July 6

Worked with Emile for an hour, progress at this stage is so slow, it can get discouraging very quickly. We still have all sorts of trouble trying to say "helloâ€™â€™. Going out for a walk into the village is a necessity for language practice but with hundreds of kids following us, the thing rapidly turns into some sort of procession. As we get more confident we will need to split up and go out separately at times when we are likely to find folk in the village. For me, the evening is likely to be the best as the men are in the fields all day. The womenâ€™s working patterns are not quite so easy to discern.

Saturday, July 9

You know that you are in for a hard day when your first thought on getting out of bed is "how long until siesta?â€™â€™ The cold that has been threatening Sue for a few days came on with a vengeance. I didnâ€™t realise that you could catch colds in Africa! My stomach is playing up again, leaving me feeling awfully tired.

Wednesday, July 13

Sue had a cookery lesson in the village, learning to prepare foutou, manioc and banana paste (not much nicer than it sounds). I meanwhile worked with Gilbert on the verb system. Walking round the village I managed to say such gems as "the two baby goats are walking in the villageâ€™â€™, I remain totally unable to say "helloâ€™â€™ however.

Thursday, July 14

David slept well, Praise the Lord. We went into Vavoua for the market, there were six or seven letters, must be a record. Sue bought a fresh chicken, you could tell it was fresh, it was still breathing. Of course, David was pleased as anything to have a live doodle-doo in the courtyard. He, unfortunately, thought that it was there to give him something to play football with.

Reading matter is a problem, Iâ€™ve brought enough books to give me one a week till we go back to Abidjan, I read the week after nextâ€™s book today.

Friday, July 15

A mixed day, mostly bad but some good. Rather inauspiciously, Sue woke up with a headache and a slight fever, both of which point to malaria. A Nivaquine treatment seemed to do the trick, it seems that she needs to recognise the symptoms early on, so as to knock it on the head. Moving out to the village, coupled with being tired out from the cold have left her wide open to it. Fortunately, I havenâ€™t been at all prone to it so far.

Saturday, July 16

Thirty minutes after writing out yesterdayâ€™s diary, saying I was not prone to malaria, I wanted to die. Chills, headache and an intense lethargy. Took buckets of nivaquine and tons of paracetamol,

wrote a few letters and moaned a lot.

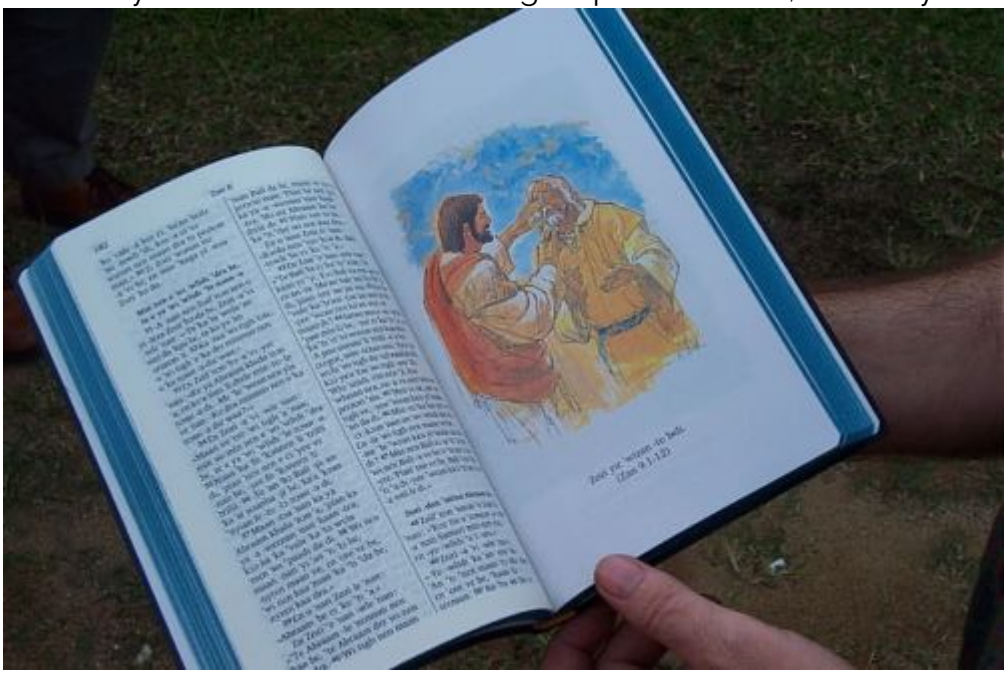
Sunday, July 31

This morning we went to church in Bahoulifla, a village about six miles away. Despite sleeping in when our alarm didnâ€™t go off we were still the first there. Being a visitor I was asked to preach. I hadnâ€™t really prepared anything and was more unhappy with what I said than I have ever been before. A combination of personal dryness and not really knowing what the people need to hear, make preaching very hard.

Most of the rest of the day was swallowed up by writing letters.

So thatâ€™s it a calendar month gone by, what have we achieved? Not a lot really, we can speak some Kouya, although it really is very little. We have got to know a few people, again though it is very few. Slowly but surely though we are beginning to see the barriers between us and the villagers be broken down. It will be months, if not years before we really have anything to contribute to life here, in the meantime, we have to accept our role as learners and stick with it.

Two years later, I had learned enough Kouya to start making a contribution to the translation work and four years after that, we left the Kouya area for a year to work in leadership in Abidjan and never returned. Sue took over my role in the project and worked with the Kouya team firstly from Abidjan and later from Southampton. Fifteen years after our first faltering steps in DÃ©ma, the Kouya New Testament was published.Â



God was very good to us, giving us the courage to do something as crazy as this and then helping us through it. More importantly, Kouya people are reading his Word in their own language. We had a small walk-on part in what God is doing amongst the Kouya, but it was an immense privilege.