

Past Visions,

Current

BY DWAYNE JANKE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVE CROUGH

A vision was a first step that got Jaap and Morina Feenstra to Northern Canada's Dogrib people. As the New Testament project concludes, they and others dream of what could happen next.

M Morina Feenstra remembers the spring day in 1979 as if it were yesterday. Then a nursing student in England, she was doing some personal Bible study near

St. Albans, a commuters' town north of London. As Morina gazed out on to the English countryside, a vivid image appeared to her.

"There was this man, let's say a figure," Morina recalls, as she tells the story in her Yellowknife, N.W.T., home. "He had on a ceremonial costume, and I didn't recognize who it was. He was standing by a river. I could see rocks and water and streams, and he was beckoning. I had no idea what this was all about."

At that time, Morina's plan was to get her registered nurse's diploma, and then return to Malaysia to work and help her family, an ethnic mix of East-Indian, Iban and Chinese backgrounds. In her second year of studies, the young Christian felt God was asking her to consider missions work back in her Asian homeland. But what was this vision all about?

Morina approached her pastor. He wisely suggested the image was either from God or it was "some sort of mind trick." After much prayer, the nursing student became convinced God was calling her into missions to the people in her vision. Morina eventually understood what the beckoning man had on his head.

"It was a war bonnet. It was clearly

what the Plains Indians would be wearing." Morina realized she might be going to North America.

Prospective husband Jaap Feenstra was a lanky young Dutchman Morina had first met in a crowd of 10,000 people at a Christian music festival in England. He struggled with her idea. So Jaap asked God to confirm their future relationship and a joint calling to the other side of the Atlantic.

"I woke up one night," Jaap recalls, "and it was just as if the Lord was saying, 'Why don't you read that *National Geographic*?' which was lying close to my bed on a table. This is in the middle of the night about 3 or 4 a.m. I just didn't feel like doing it, but I did it anyway. There was this whole article about the Plains Indians in North Dakota. It really spoke to me and I became intrigued and started reading lots about the North American Indians."

Before long, Morina and Jaap were going to North America.

After marriage, further Bible college studies in Europe, and discovering the worldwide need for Bible translation, the Feenstras joined Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1982. Eventually, God fine-tuned their vision for serving First Nations people in North America, to the Dogrib people of Canada's North. They were the fourth team on the project (see "Focus," page 2). (More recently, fellow SIL colleagues Vic and Anita Monus also joined the team as translation consultants, shifting the Dogrib project "into overdrive," as Jaap puts it.)



Bookend Visions

The Feenstras' story started with a vision—the first of many road signs that directed them to their assignment. It is ending with a dream too. As the Dogrib New Testament project they have worked on for more than 15 years nears completion, they express new hopes for what God's Word will do now that it is translated.

"The people who really need it," says Jaap, 49, "are probably the generation over 30 or 40 years of age for whom a lot of the English Bible is a closed book. The 'genetically modified Seed' for the

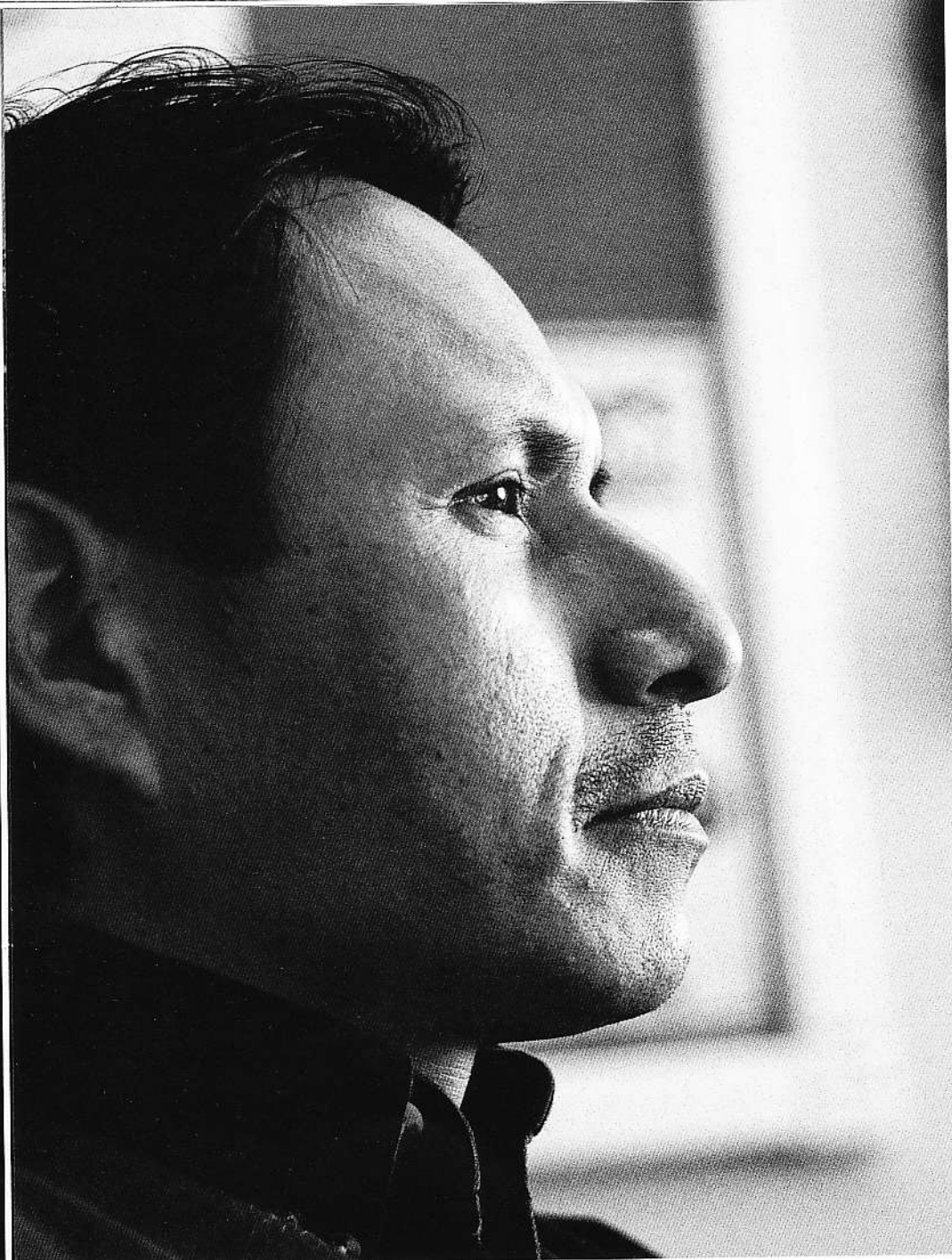
t Dreams



Jaap and Morina Feenstra excitedly anticipate the completion of the Dogrib New Testament project. Jaap leads the translation team from Yellowknife, Northwest Territories (above). After living and adapting to the subarctic climate in two Dogrib villages, the Dutch/Malaysian couple relocated to Yellowknife due to the educational needs of their four children—now two young adults, a teenager and a preteen.



Morina meets Bessie Erasmus, an old friend in Rae-Edzo. Morina's Malaysian features and outgoing nature helped her build important relationships within the Dogrib community.



More Than Whiteman's Religion

The two main Dogrib translators, Mary Siemens and Marie Louise Bouvier-White, are both excited—in a soft-spoken way—about the fruit of their labour.

"It's a lot of work," says Mary, who has been doing Bible translation on and off, part time and full time since 1984 (see "Strong Like Two People," page 4). "It's a relief, but it's exciting. We're going to finally see what we've been working on."

She calls it a "dream come true" for the Dogrib people to have God's Word in their mother tongue.

"To be able to express in your language God's love, it really touches the heart, makes more sense and has a richer meaning."

Marie Louise began translating in 1993 and has since narrated various audio-recordings of Dogrib Scripture portions (see "Beyond the Printed Page" page 15). She comes by the work naturally as the granddaughter of legendary Dogrib interpreter Michel Bouvier. He interpreted between government officials and Dogrib leaders when English was relatively unknown in the region.

John B. Zoe is the Dogrib's chief land-claims negotiator with the N.W.T. and federal governments. The forward-looking young leader is chairman of the Dogrib Translation Committee (overseeing the Bible translation) and he narrated the voice of Christ in the *JESUS* film.

Who are the Dogrib?

Their Name

Tribal legend says the Dogrib people descended from human-born dogs that could change into humans.

Geography

Northwest Territories (N.W.T.), north of Great Slave Lake. Rugged sub-arctic region. Rocky terrain, bush, stunted tree growth, lakes and rivers.

Population

3,100; a sub-group of the Dene (DEN-aye) people.

Settlements

Rae-Edzo and five other smaller communities.

Livelihood

Traditionally nomadic hunter/gatherers. Still harvest game, especially caribou. Hundreds have mining, government, business and outdoorsmen guide jobs.

Language

One of N.W.T.'s 11 official languages. Complicated sounds, 41 letters, and dictionary of 5,000-plus entries.



Unlike her forefather's work, Marie Louise has grappled with unique biblical ideas so that their original meaning in Scripture speaks deeply to her people. For example, she talks about using the Dogrib term "Big Boss" for "Son of Man," so Jesus isn't mistakenly viewed as an ordinary person.

That kind of translation effort is making a difference. Marie Louise says that when the *JESUS* film in Dogrib

39,000 square kilometres of sub-surface and surface land rights, and self-government (see <www.tlicho.com>). Over lunch at the Chinese-run "Trapper's Hide-Away Restaurant" in Rae-Edzo, the young philosophical leader says the Dogrib need to be transportable between traditional and White cultures: "strong like two people." (See page 4.)

The translated New Testament will play a key role in maintaining Dogrib

"Going into this new era . . . we need to draw on our strengths, which includes language."

—John B. Zoe

was shown in the community of Wha Ti, it prompted one little boy to declare: "I didn't know God spoke Dogrib."

She expects that the Dogrib New Testament will help her people realize the Gospel is really for them too.

"The people think it's a whiteman's religion," says the former special needs teacher, currently living in Yellowknife. "But it is for everyone."

A Key Tool

While the Dogrib New Testament will soon be finished, the translation efforts actually sputtered for several years after the Feenstras arrived in 1985. Jaap was trained to understand the original meaning of the Scripture, but mother-tongue speakers were needed to actually do the translation.

Feenstra credits John B. Zoe, the Dogrib's chief land-claims negotiator with the N.W.T. and federal governments, with understanding the need. In 1995, he encouraged school administrators to release Mary Siemens part time from her language facilitator's job to do translation. Dogrib institutions have covered a substantial portion of her salary, as well as the salaries of others who became involved in the project.

Meanwhile, after 10 years of expensive negotiations, the Dogrib made an agreement (soon to be ratified by their people) that will give them \$90 million,

identity and self-reliance because it is in the language that is so deeply connected to their way of life.

"It's easy to lose yourself in any kind of journey, but we need some real strengths so we don't lose ourselves," explains John. "Going into this new era, language becomes an important thing. That's what draws you back because language is derived from the land. We need to draw on our strengths, which includes language."

The Scriptures will help the Dogrib take more direct responsibility for their faith, says John, who heads the Dogrib Translation Committee (which oversees the Bible translation) and spoke the words of Christ in the *JESUS* film.

"We're looking ahead to a period where Father Pochat is gone and this will be a key tool to sustain the life of the church in the community," he says. "The accomplishment of the Word being done *with* the people is finally going to happen. The spreading of the Word is finally not just the spreading of it, but it is being put into practice."

For the Dogrib people, this is a timely vision, an important dream. ♣



More on the Web

Why translate God's Word for a small group like the Dogrib people? Jaap Feenstra answers at <www.wycliffe.ca/wordalive>.

Beyond the Printed Page



Jim Stauffer, a missionary with Northern Canada Evangelical Mission (NCEM), and Dogrib narrator Marie Louise Bouvier-White, record translated Scriptures in Dogrib. The Dogrib translation team has always had a passion for God's Word in oral and visual forms.

About 70 per cent of Dogrib speakers are either monolingual or use Dogrib as their language of preference. The language is also taught in schools and special adult classes. While mother tongue literacy is likely to increase after the Dogrib land-claims agreement gives them self-government, only about 30 per cent of Dogrib speakers can now read their own language.

To deal with the situation, the Dogrib translation team has always had a vision for God's Word in oral and visual forms, which fits the Dogrib culture well.

Enter Jim Stauffer, a missionary with Northern Canada Evangelical Mission (NCEM) who has lived in the Dogrib community of Wha Ti since 1983, with his wife Lois and their three children.

With Jaap Feenstra's encouragement, Jim has helped initiate various non-print media projects. Using preliminary translations of the Dogrib Scripture, he has helped produce audio recordings of New Testament portions, the *JESUS* film on video and interactive computer versions of the *Walking with Jesus* series, from the Canadian Bible Society.

Hundreds of cassette tapes, CDs, videos and talking books are having a quiet impact in Dogrib homes, Bible study groups, schools and vehicles. "A lot of people have CD players in their trucks and they want to listen when they go down the highway," says Jim.

He is anxious to see the final version of the Dogrib New Testament available so existing non-print media can be revised and the rest of the Scriptures recorded.

"What I'd like to do is spend more time visiting people and playing the Scriptures for them," says Jim, dreaming aloud. "There's a possibility of doing a radio show and things like that. The possibilities are endless and are only limited by your imagination and the time it takes to do them." ♣

Illumination in a Dining Room

BY DWAYNE JANKE

On the home stretch of their project, the Dogrib New Testament team tackles some final translation problems.

After several days of cold, overcast weather, a low-angled sun is out and unobstructed over Yellowknife, N.W.T.

Brilliant sunbeams reflect off a snowy ground on this winter day outside of Jaap and Morina Feenstra's split-level, suburban home on Nuttall Court. Sunshine streams into the dining room through a set of French patio doors. The room is drenched with wide shafts of light and warmth, hopefully a good sign of things to come this afternoon (opposite page).

Jaap, an SIL translation consultant, and two Dogrib translators, Mary Siemens and Marie Louise Bouvier-White, definitely need a little more illumination.

Sticky Problems

They must tackle a final half-dozen sticky problems in the translation of the New Testament they have worked on for more than 10 years. Another woman, Alice Sangris, has been invited to attend the meeting to test how well their translated verses might be comprehended by a typical Dogrib speaker.

As the group first arrives and enjoys coffee in the living room, Jaap inspires them by showing what has come in the mail recently. It's a first-draft print-out

of the typeset New Testament text in Dogrib, done by the Canadian Bible Society (CBS).

"Wow!" says Mary, smiling as she leafs through the plastic, spiral-bound booklet. "Is that print-out for us?"

She says she would like to read from it at the small Protestant church group she attends in the Dogrib community of Rae-Edzo, northwest of Yellowknife. Tli Cho Christian Fellowship, which has about 70 people, is led by David Shed, a Native Gospel Outreach missionary.

Jaap disappoints her by explaining it is his only version. "It's a matter of weeks and we will get more copies."

Next, Alice thumbs through the booklet. "Oh man, this is good!" she exclaims. "This is the *real* treaty. This one will never change."

There is a clear sense of anticipation in the air as the Dogrib people look ahead to the coming printing and distribution of their Scriptures. Yes, God's printed Word is coming soon—but it is not here quite yet.

Questioning the Truth

Jaap's more immediate concern is the lingering doubts he has about some translated words and phrases in the four Gospels, Romans and Revelation. The team gathers around the pine dining room table, now a working space covered with a few computers.

After an opening prayer asking God for wisdom, the four start the checking session. They turn their attention to two pages of the problematic Scripture verses in Dogrib that Jaap has printed from his computer. The text also appears on the computer screens in front of them.

One challenging passage is John 18: 37-38, where Christ tells Pontius Pilate that everyone on the side of truth listens to Him. In response, Pilate asks, "What is truth?" and walks away.

Jaap turns to Alice after reading the verses. "Why, Alice, would he say, 'Nàowo ehkw'i ayii awèidi?' 'What do you mean with truth?'"

Alice seems unsure. But after Marie Louise reads the verses again, Alice says, that to her, Pilate is asking a genuine question.

"It's supposed to be a rhetorical question," Jaap replies. "Pilate is saying, 'We don't even know what truth is.'"

Marie Louise catches onto the concept: "Pilate went out [of the room] because 'truth' doesn't mean anything to him."

Mary offers an optional wording that makes the Dogrib translation of Pilate's question more sarcastic in tone. The group discusses and tweaks the phrasing, until in Dogrib it says: "What may the truth be anyway?"