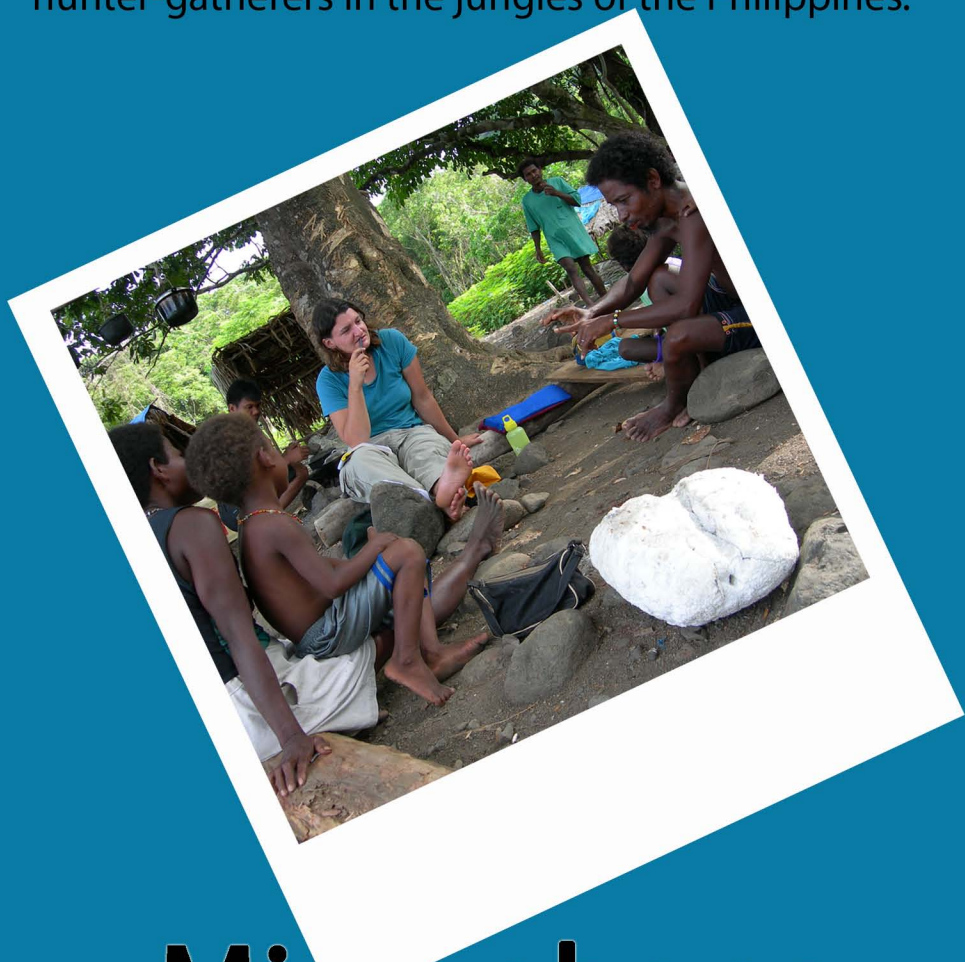


A young woman battles armed terrorists, a kidnapper, malaria, a tsunami, and dial-up Internet as she documents the endangered languages of hunter-gatherers in the jungles of the Philippines.



Microphone in the mud

by Laura C. Robinson
with Gary Robinson



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Department of Linguistics, UHM

Moore Hall 569

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PREFACE

All of the events in this book are true. Although about half of it was written while it took place, and the rest is based on meticulous notes, some of the dialogue and detailed descriptions are necessarily approximations. In addition, some of the timeline has been condensed (for example, combining the events of two days into one) to preserve narrative flow. Finally, the names of many characters have been changed. In a few cases, identifying details have also been changed to preserve anonymity.

Gary Robinson, my father, did much of the work of editing the journal entries I kept into book form. He also helped edit much of the text, injecting his own experiences based on his three-week trip which takes place in the middle of this narrative. He was able to meet the majority of the characters and visit most of the places where the action of the book takes place.

A young woman battles armed terrorists, a kidnapper, malaria, a tsunami, and dial-up Internet as she documents the endangered languages of hunter-gatherers in the jungles of the Philippines.

1 CAGAYAN HONEYCOMBS

He led me away from the Agta camp into the jungle, using his machete to slice through the thick-veined vines that lay across our path. Two small children, excited and laughing, followed barefoot in their shorts and T-shirts. A bush with sharp thorns I hadn't seen cut a straight line on my thigh that turned red beneath my walking shorts as the little girls scrambled past me and over a boulder.

"Awan kam magbuyot; singatan kam," he said in Agta to the girls. *Don't run. You'll get stung.*

He sent me ahead and took their hands to return to camp. I watched them evaporate behind me into the foliage, and when I turned back all I could see were branches and dense green vegetation. I was already lost. "Gregory!"

He reappeared with the girls in hand, and we continued. He climbed a large rock and jumped a gap. I scrambled behind him and gasped at a ten-foot drop, but the little girls were already over it. We stopped on a ledge. Two Agta men stood near a pile of cut bushes, tree limbs, and dry sticks circling a tree trunk. Gregory pointed up into the tree.

"Makitam?" Do you see it? He asked in Ilokano.

"Awan bi a mag'enta," I answered in my broken Agta. I can't see it. I handed Gregory my digital camera to take a picture of the beehive for me.

"Bassit lang." It's very small, he said as he looked at the digital screen and held the camera in his hand like a precious stone. He continued, "The *ugden* have cameras you can see through." *Ugden* is the Agta word for the non-Agta people of the Philippines.

Gregory insisted that the girls and I return to camp so that we wouldn't get stung. I tossed my lighter down to one of the men by the tree, who caught it as lightly as a baseball player. Gregory, the girls, and I walked back on the invisible path. I had droplets of blood on both of my legs now but

the three Agta were fine.

I squatted in the shade at the edge of the camp—four lean-to huts with thatched roofs in a grassy clearing—and waited. Smoke began to rise above the jungle. There were thrashing noises, and the men yelled for buckets, their voices loud—they couldn't be more than a hundred yards away. Gregory scooped up a black cooking pot and the bucket used for cleaning dishes and washed them in the nearby river. Judging that they were clean enough, he hurried into the thick brush. Ten minutes later the three men emerged smiling, displaying the pot and bucket loaded with golden honeycombs and swirls of dark chocolate-brown honey.

Each Agta family brought its own pot and received a share. Gregory's wife Sisi washed out the Tupperware container I had brought to the camp that morning with our lunch and gave me a honeycomb. I sat on the bamboo floor of Gregory and Sisi's hut as he showed me how to chew a piece of the comb then spit out the wax. The intense wild honey taste, the best I had ever had, was a mixture of sweet and tart flavors as complicated as that of a fine wine.

Gregory was in his mid-thirties, a short, handsome man with dark skin and black curly hair. He had a well-trimmed beard and wore khaki shorts and no shoes. I grabbed my notebook and wrote the Agta words for bee egg, *sinaga*, and honey, *habu*. Gregory asked if I had ever eaten this before. I said that I'd had honey but never honeycomb.

"Does that honey come from Cagayan?" he asked me.

"No. We have lots of bees in my place. In America. But I'm from the city and I never ate honeycomb. Only honey."

Gregory was amazed. "You have bees in America?" Gregory's sister and brother-in-law gave us some of the fish they were cooking and I offered them the rice I had brought, which we ate along with the honeycomb as the light faded. I turned on my digital recorder, and Gregory told a story about a young Agta man who went into the forest and caught a wild pig and then found a beehive, took the honey, and came back and traded it for rice.

Then he taught me a new Dupaningan Agta word. "An *ibay* is a non-Agta person."

"Like *ugden*?"

"Yes," he said, "But an *ugden* who is friendly with the Agta."

He was my friend, and he became my protector while I was in the jungle, and that is why it was such a shock when he later betrayed me to a kidnapper.

2 THE PAPER WITH THE NAMES AND NUMBERS

Two months earlier and five thousand miles away from Cagayan Province, I sat in the Honolulu airport lobby waiting for my flight to the Philippines. I was on my way to document an endangered language spoken by only fifteen hundred hunter-gathers in a region so remote that the latest research on the language was almost twenty years old. I didn't know if the Agta people in Cagayan still lived in the rain forest or if they continued to speak their language.

There was another worry. My professors told me that the communist New People's Army, or NPA, terrorists were still active in Cagayan, in the eastern and northern Luzon Island. Over the years they had lost their political ideology and mostly became thugs. Their main activity now was kidnapping local politicians and rich people for ransom. But Jason, a leftist graduate student I met in Honolulu and who was now studying in the Philippines, told me I shouldn't be too concerned about them because he was sure they wouldn't kidnap Americans. I hoped he was right.

In the weeks before I left, my friends gave me more good advice than I could ever use. My ex-boyfriend Sean, a short, rugged, tattooed Aussie with a lifetime of military experience at 35, had so many survival tips that I forgot most of them while he was speaking. He'd carefully studied the equipment that would take me through the next eleven months and said, "You've got to replace that water purifier."

When he saw me in the aisle of the sports store in Honolulu with the new one, I thought he would break down right there and cry. All Sean could do was hug me and thank me for buying it because he was sure it would keep me safe. He said, "I can drink water from the toilet with that good filter tomorrow to prove to you how well it works." It was no surprise that he failed to follow through on that promise. Sean was unable to say good-bye, and he was mysteriously absent on my last day, leaving me with a feeling of emptiness as I waited for the plane.

The cab had a dented fender and a long scrape on one side. I slid into the back seat and we took off. The shocks in the antique vehicle had long since broken and as we raced through the traffic, the car banged into an enormous pothole, sending me flying toward the roof. My hair grazed it, but my head was safe, and I landed with a thud in the unyielding seat. I am only five-foot-one, and I realized that being short was a distinct advantage in this cab.

In graduate school, I'd taken two years of Tagalog, the national language of the Philippines, and a year and a half of Ilokano, the regional language of northern Luzon Island, where I would be working. I didn't know a single word of Agta, and I was shy about using a language other than English, but the driver's English was hopeless, and he seemed eager to talk. I worked up the courage to try, "*Matrapik ba kasi alas singko?*" Tagalog, especially in Manila, has lots of influence from both English and Spanish. Traffic becomes *ma-trapik*, and the times of the day are straight from Spanish, just spelled differently. *A las cinco, five o'clock*, becomes *alas singko*. He didn't know what I was saying and reverted to English, but I couldn't understand him, and when I responded in Tagalog he couldn't understand me. He gave up. It was only my first day, and I had 330 days to keep trying.

I was eighteen hours into my grand adventure, and I was exhausted. I made it to the SIL boarding house, ate dinner, and passed out in my room by 7:30, and so I was up at 3:30 in the morning ready to go.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics is a Christian missionary group that does excellent linguistics work in some fifty countries and translates the New Testament into indigenous languages. It's a limited goal, translating the Bible into endangered languages all over the world, but the SIL accomplishes groundbreaking linguistics work by doing it. They also produce math books, reading primers, and storybooks in endangered languages. And they were running a professional linguistics conference in Manila that I was about to attend.

With nothing else to do, I laid out my plans. I would buy supplies and head by bus on the main highway to the small town of Santa Ana at the far northern end of Luzon Island, three hundred sixty miles from Manila. I would create a dictionary and a grammar of Dupanangan Agta (one of a dozen languages called "Agta") and make high-quality audio recordings documenting hundreds of hours of Agta speech. I would develop photographic and video records of the Agta speaking their language and include detailed information about the number and location of Agta speakers as I found them. My research would be stored in digital format at an archive in Australia so that it could be accessed by other linguists and

interested parties from anywhere in the world and, most importantly, by the Agta people themselves at a future date.

I would have to use Ilokano for basic communication when I was with the Agta (most of them speak it as a second language), although I was by no means fluent. Linguists study the structure of languages—we don't know all the thousands of languages used on our planet—but if I didn't speak Ilokano I would miss many of the crucial details that could mean the difference between success and failure. For two years I had planned this trip. Now, I could hardly wait to get going.

After breakfast, I sat in a worn armchair in the dimly lit lobby of the boarding house. The room's ceramic lamps, faux-Oriental rug, armchairs, and wooden table would have been quite fashionable when they were installed in the 1950s, but now they reminded me of a set for a movie that my pre-baby boom father would rent. I had work to do on my laptop, but I was afraid to plug it in. The slots looked exactly the same as they did in the States, but I was worried the computer would short circuit, so I waited hopefully for someone to come by who knew the answer. Appearances can be deceiving—like the water. In my room it came out of the tap crystal-clear and difficult to resist, but there would be no tap water on my toothbrush. No swallowing the water in the shower. I'd filled up the sink, put in a small hose, and pumped the water through the miracle purifier into my plastic bottle.

I jumped at an electric pop!, but it wasn't my computer. I looked around and saw it was just a bug that got wiped out by the bright-blue zappers lining the room. At that moment an SIL missionary I'd met at breakfast walked down the worn staircase and I waved him over. When he sat in the armchair facing me, I asked, "Can you tell me about voltage so it doesn't harm my computer?" He was a skilled public speaker so practiced at not offending his audience that his lengthy answer was precariously balanced between the pros and the cons, the good and the bad, the possible and the unlikely, that I couldn't decipher his meaning. I decided to buy a transformer the next day. Pop! Another bug dead. I hoped this one was a mosquito. It's amazing how many deadly things lie in innocent packages in the third world. Normal-looking outlets, crystal-clear water, and tiny mosquitoes harboring malaria.

A few hours later I got my first look at Manila, a sprawling city with garbage-strewn streets and thick blue smog. Heat waves rose from the pavement and a swamp-like stench filled the late morning air. Taxi drivers honked at buses trying to edge them off the road, ignored lanes and traffic lights, and aimed for pedestrians. There were people everywhere. My cab driver had his radio blaring Tagalog pop songs and his window open so that he could wave his fist and shout at each vehicle that failed to move aside when he leaned on his horn. He was not interested in conversing with a

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young foreigner. A plastic statuette of Saint Christopher was attached to his dashboard. I assumed that it was the statue and not his professional driving skill that got us safely to the shopping center.

I was directed to the second floor of an enormous building with a large open atrium, where a sea of vendors, hundreds of stalls jammed into a space fifty yards by twenty yards, all sold cell phones.

“Yes, ma’am?” “You like?” “Chargers? Batteries?” I shook my head as I wrestled through the madding crowd. What had Nora, whose family had helped me at the airport, told me to do? All the phones looked the same. A sales woman in one shop with gray hair and wearing a conservative blue dress looked honest. How could I tell? I pointed to one. “*Magkano ba iyon?*”

“*Pain-pain.*” *Five-five*—5,500 pesos, or about \$110 American. Too expensive. I walked a few steps and pointed, and a short man with a bent back said that one was 4,500 pesos with a SIM card, charger, and headset included. I took it and for an extra three dollars had it customized a nice color. Maybe I paid too much. When I dialed Nora, she was relieved that I was okay. Her concern about my safety seemed excessive, but a year later, after I returned to America, a terrorist’s bomb killed eleven people in a Manila shopping mall.

After dinner I met Joe McAlpin, a quiet SIL missionary who had been working with the Dupanangan Agta people for the last fifteen years, but had never published a single thing about their language. A slight man with a soft voice, this mellow guy was in complete contrast with the belligerent Joe McAlpin I emailed from Hawai’i. At first, he didn’t answer my emails, then refused to help me, discouraged me from working with the Agta, and pointedly told me not to visit Bolos Point, where he had lived and worked with the Agta. In person he was a pussycat. McAlpin tried to teach me a few words.

“The Agta word “*ania*” means *what* in English.”

“That’s the same word in Ilokano.”

“It is? I didn’t know that.” He translated the New Testament into Dupanangan Agta, but he didn’t speak a word of Ilokano, the lingua franca—the common language—of the region, the second language of virtually all the Agta. I doubted the quality of Agta translations if he didn’t speak Ilokano. I would later find out that the Agta mixed so much Ilokano into their speech that it should rightfully be called Agtano, like Spanglish.

A few weeks before I left on my trip to the Philippines, during the

Laura C. Robinson

Christmas holiday at my parents' home in Oakland, California, I gave my father a slip of paper with two names and phone numbers. One of the names was Sean, my ex, the Australian Green Beret; the other was a friend in Honolulu. I suggested that my father not tell my mother about the paper because we didn't want to make her nervous. He was to call the names, find out what they recommended, and then take strong and aggressive action in the unlikely event that during my eleven months of work in the Philippines, I should be kidnapped.

3 STRANGE INTRUDERS

The Summer Institute of Linguistics produces a catalog called “Ethnologue” listing the nearly 7,000 languages spoken on our planet. It is a terrific resource and includes maps showing where each language is spoken along with a lot of other information. The Ethnologue lists 175 languages for the Philippines—four of which are already extinct, but fewer than 30 of those have dictionaries.

I lined up in the predawn with a bunch of SIL linguist missionaries plus a few other non-religious linguists and boarded a van for the airport, all of us bound for a conference in Puerto Princesa on the central Philippine Island of Palawan. In the humid, crowded airport, I met Dan Kauffman, a graduate student from Cornell, a lively young guy with crazy curly hair and black-rimmed glasses. He shouted over the din of the crowd about his undergraduate work at the University of the Philippines in Manila. As we boarded the plane he continued only a shade more quietly, “I used to drink water right out of the hose in the back of the dorm. Oh sure, I got a little sick at first, but, you know, after that I was fine. Start off small. Get used to the water.”

So I did. In my hotel room after dinner I used the cool, clear, suspicious tap water to brush my teeth. The next night, at the banquet dinner for the conference participants, I brazenly downed a glass of water in a room full of watching linguists. I did not get sick, but I did have a slight stomachache in the morning.

Dan and I and two other guys from the conference stood in front of our hotel the next night. Hundreds of three-wheeled motorcycles whizzed by with sidecars topped by metal roofs to block out the elements. I was sure I had seen replicas of these motorized tricycles driven by bad guys trying to gun down Indiana Jones. Some of the tricycles were sky blue, others were day-glow orange, scarlet, or puce green, and while they were dirty and their

tail pipes spouted polluted clouds, they had their own charm.

I thought that I might like to catch a tricycle cab, and one prescient driver stopped to offer us a ride. We piled in and the driver drove frantically, searching for a vegetarian restaurant whose name we had heard from other conference-goers. He paused to ask directions from a pedestrian and accelerated away. Puerto Princesa seemed like a small town, but it was the capital of the province and every street lined with dingy shops led to another street exactly the same, until at last we stopped, and he pointed to a drab door.

We ducked into the thatched-roofed eatery and were suddenly in an American Santa Fe-style restaurant. I ordered a burrito, beans wrapped in a tortilla. It tasted like it was made by someone who had heard the word burrito but never tasted one. There were ice cubes in the bottom of my mango shake, but I drank the whole thing and it was good. We walked down the cacophonous street afterward to an open-air bar with a thatched motif and 80s music pouring from the speakers. We each ordered a beer, and they came in glasses with already-melting ice cubes, and I downed that too.

The next morning fifty linguists got up at 4 a.m. to drive to the Tabon Caves, the oldest archaeological site in the Philippines, with human habitation dating back perhaps 24,000 years. Our ancient bus spewed angry white fumes and bounced along a two-lane road for hours. Dan had information on everything we saw from the window. "Over the millennia, small mammals living on an island such as this tend to grow larger as a species because they have few natural predators." I would have been interested, but I was starting to get sick from the rocking and stench, and then the rear tire hit one pot hole too many and died. We filed off while the driver fixed the flat, and I could see that this was going to take some time. We were in a tiny, lively town. The dogs were thin, but the people seemed healthy. Flimsy shops selling T-shirts and bananas looked like they would collapse if someone leaned on them. In one local pharmacy I learned the Tagalog name for motion-sickness medicine, and I was starting to feel better by the time we resumed the journey. I was just glad it wasn't the water that had made me queasy. With the bus rocking back and forth as it advanced along the winding road, one of the senior linguists stood and reported in an authoritative voice over the noise of the engine, "I believe that a variation of the Tagbanwa language is spoken in the town where we just stopped. At least that is what I tentatively ascertained from a twenty-minute interview with a fruit juice vendor and his assistant."

After the bus ride, we boarded a double outrigger catamaran and set off. It was as if someone had taken my notion of a tropical paradise and brought it to life. We whipped across crystal blue-green water and passed a steep limestone cliff with umbrella-shaped trees and tiny white-sand

beaches that vanished at the edge of the jungle. An eagle emerged from a tree and flew a long, slow circle over the water around our boat. I imagined that it was eyeing some strange intruders as I watched it disappear back into the heavy vegetation. We landed on a rocky beach, where I held my shoes and socks in my hands, rolled up my pants, and waded ashore. Dan did the same and we watched a lazy three-foot-long monitor lizard with a deep ridge along its scaly, pale green back wander across our path. We hiked up a set of steep stairs cut into a hill. A Palawan Hornbill circled above us squawking loudly as we climbed, perhaps toward its nest.

The Tabon caves were beautiful but all the artifacts that make the caves important were gone, put in a museum somewhere. The amazing thing was how people must have gotten there. About 30,000 years ago there was a land bridge that connected what is now the Philippines with the Asian continent. Sea levels were way down then as result of a great ice age. So these early human beings must have walked over the land bridge thousands of miles, not knowing where they were going, and they took thousands of years to get to these very caves. What unbelievable hardships did they have to put up with? And why did they keep on traveling when they didn't know where they were going? It makes me think that maybe my own trip across thousands of miles, with, of course, the modern conveniences of airplanes, buses, and bottles of beer to make the trip easier, had at least one of the same roots—adventure.

It wasn't mentioned on any signs, but it's likely that the people who lived in the Tabon Caves might have been the ancestors of the modern Negrito peoples. The term Negrito, amazingly, is not considered a slur when referring to the ethnic minorities of the Philippines. In Spanish *negro* means "black" and *-ito* means "small." The Agta, like most of the Negritos in the Philippines, are short (about my size), dark-skinned people with black curly hair. The current majority Filipinos are descendant from an ethnolinguistic migration of people who left Taiwan before 2,500 BCE and who brought with them what is known as the Austronesian language family. Sometime within the last 4,500 years the original Negrito languages disappeared and were replaced by the languages of the incoming Austronesians. The new people possessed superior technology, especially rice farming, which is why they became the dominant culture in the area.

We briefly toured a small state-run museum a few miles from the caves. The Philippine National Museum in Manila has a portion of the skull of a woman who lived in the Tabon Caves 22,000 to 24,000 years ago and a magnificent burial jar topped with two human figures, but the local museum displays were so uncreative, with typed 3x5 cards for explanations, that its pre-historic flaked tools, so rich in culture and that should have given us a rare insight into the lives of these ancient human beings, were boring and lifeless. Dan and I followed along in the back of our group and

joked about our guide, who hinted that the early people who lived in the Tabon Caves were ancestors of the modern Filipinos. He didn't mention the Negritos.

When we returned to Manila, Dan and I walked to a bank to get some Philippine pesos. It was after closing time, and a woman ahead of us in line entered the glass-enclosed ATM booth and shut the door behind her. My friend and I were chatting away about our research projects when we realized that the woman had been inside for a long time. Finally she popped her head out of the door and asked Dan if he could help, and he went into the booth with her. After she emerged with her cash, Dan raised his voice in anger, "All of the instructions for the ATM are in English. The woman couldn't get money out of her own account in her own hometown because the damn instructions were written in a foreign language that she couldn't read."

Back in Manila, I arose before 3 a.m. to pack my bag, and Dan took me to the bus station. We said good-bye, and I felt lonely leaving my last friend as I boarded my third-class bus. I found a seat by a window and waved. The bus started to roll and I wondered if I would be safe as a single woman in a dangerous country. Would I be able to apply what I had learned in school and actually document the Dupaningan Agta language? Would I make friends? The bus drove along the city streets and I watched the darkened buildings of the dingy city. I dozed as we passed through the suburbs. The bus slowly made its way north along the Maharlika Highway that bisected Luzon Island. From the dirty, streaked window, I saw the rural Philippines, men and women working in rice fields, water buffalo pulling plows, and miniature, by American standards, houses. They had concrete walls and tin roofs if the people were lucky, thatch and bamboo if they were not. The hazy suggestion of a mountain hung in the background. *Sari-sari* stores, tucked into people's houses or fronting the road, tiny stalls no larger than outhouses, sold Coca-Cola, cigarettes, candy, and cell-phone minutes. The bus was to continue all the way to Tuguegarao, the capital of Cagayan Province, and on to Santa Ana, where I would be living and studying Agta for nearly a year. After reading about these towns and picturing them in my mind for so long, it felt strange to stop before I got to my final destination, but after a bumpy eight-hour ride in an uncomfortable seat I was delighted to get off at a Jollibee restaurant in the town of Solano. Jollibee is an American-style fast-food chain that isn't exactly American. Rising above the restaurant was a statue of a jolly, red-haired cartoon bee wearing a chef's hat and smiling madly. *Mais con yelo* in Tagalog was amusingly translated on the menu as Ice Craze, but even a casual acquaintance with Spanish would

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make it clear that this tasty dessert was *corn with ice*. It was not surprising that Tagalog speakers would have borrowed the words for corn (a New-World crop) and ice (this is the tropics) from the Spanish, who had colonized the Philippines and brutally ruled the country for more than three centuries.

During the linguistics conference in Palawan, I had arranged to see a young professor in the town of Solano who had written a thesis about the Agta people. Before meeting her I went for a walk on the local university campus. It gave me a comfortable feeling in a place so far from home. The university was nestled between two dark green mountain ranges, where partial cloud cover made the heat bearable. The dusty path cut across a brown lawn and between squat concrete buildings. A small agricultural school, with water buffalo sleeping in the rice fields beyond the buildings, the campus reminded me of University of California at Davis, known for its agricultural studies, with cows in its fields, where I studied linguistics and anthropology as an undergraduate.



FIGURE 1 LAURA IN SOLANO

I got into my major at Davis almost by accident. A friend mentioned a linguistics course, and it sounded interesting. One day while the professor explained a famous linguistic study, I noticed something strange. The class was over, my fellow students were gone, and the ruffled professor, humorous and long-winded, was the only other person in the lecture hall. That was when I knew I would major in linguistics.

Historical linguistics became my favorite. Solving problems in historical linguistics in college was like working on crossword puzzles. But my linguistics courses were missing something. The professors never mentioned the people who spoke the languages. It was as if the words floated out across the classrooms and didn't come from anywhere or go anywhere. It was anthropology that was missing, for me the perfect complement to linguistics. I decided I wanted to work in historical linguistics to help reconstruct languages and cultures that vanished long ago, and I wanted to work with people to help them save their endangered languages.

The young professor's thesis proved to be no help in my work, but she arranged for me to be a guest that night at the home of the dean of Arts and Sciences at the university. Ate Elotte was tall for a Filipino woman, with light skin and a thin face that matched her stern but also affectionate demeanor. Ate, pronounced "AH-tay," is Tagalog for "older sister" and a term of respect and endearment. I was learning that people in the Philippines were friendly and protective of a young female researcher traveling alone in their country. After a simple dinner and a good night's sleep, we had a leisurely breakfast and I caught a late-morning bus that would get me to a hotel on the outskirts of Santa Ana by early evening.

4 I GO TO CHURCH

I got up early the next morning, eager to see Santa Ana. I had slept in a government hotel a few kilometers from town. The hotel was a creepy place surrounded by a wire fence ten feet high and guarded by soldiers armed with shotguns. Leaving it was like getting out of jail. I hopped into a tricycle taxi and asked for the Santa Ana central market. I rode into town in style, but when the driver dropped me off I wondered if I was in the right place. The Centro was a little outpost on the side of the road with dilapidated and unpainted wooden walls. It was a square block of connected rundown shops selling batteries, flip-flops, bread, canned goods, cell phones, kitchenware, and clothes. In the back, in a dusty field no more than fifty yards square, was a more traditional market where local people sold fruit, vegetables, and unrefrigerated meat under a canvas roof, held up by heavy wooden poles. The dozens of tricycles lined up in front of the Centro's shops were a bit different from the ones in Puerto Princesa. The motorcycles had a passenger seat in front beside the driver and pulled enclosed compartments containing two facing benches, each of which could hold three or four adults.

I was pleased that I was in a town, indeed in the northern half of a province, that was free from McDonald's and Jollibee and American commercialism, but on the other hand, there was no ATM or high-speed internet in Santa Ana. The nearest brand-name stores were in Tuguegarao, the capital, a polluted city I had gratefully passed by on the road. I was raised in a big city in the San Francisco Bay Area, but I've always felt more at ease in the country. Nothing brings peace to my heart like a clear view of the night sky. In Santa Ana I hoped to see the moon and stars every single night, forgetting momentarily about the monsoon season.

I bought some bread and fruit and sat on a bench to eat my first Santa Ana lunch. The small, bright-yellow bananas were intensely sweet. Everyone in the Centro was staring at me. One elderly man came over and I

introduced myself in Tagalog. I told him my Ilokano was weak, and he proceeded to teach me some phrases that I already knew from class, such as “I love you.” I smiled and repeated the phrase back to him as he beamed proudly. Soon a crowd of men gathered and we were chatting, but mostly the first old man did the talking. The men who grouped in front of me were friendly and even shy, and I didn’t feel at all threatened. The old man owned a tricycle and was eager to give me a ride.

When I was still in Hawai’i, I had exchanged text messages with Ed Pascua, a Santa Ana city employee who worked with a nearby Agta settlement. He was out of town for the weekend taking classes in Tuguegarao for a master’s degree in social work, but he had told me the name of the camp and of the Agta leader he worked with. And so on that bright and clear Saturday morning in Santa Ana I was able to tell the old man that I wanted to go to Barangay Marede. A *barangay* is small subdivision of a province, and there are 820 of them in Cagayan. The word originally meant “boat” and got its present meaning because the boat was the most important unit of social organization in the pre-colonial Philippines.

As I got in the tricycle, a young man who had been silent called out, in a high-pitched voice, “*Mis, ingat!*” *Miss, be careful!*

Another man nodded toward the driver and tilted his cupped hand to his mouth, but by the time I finally realized that my extroverted driver was drunk, it was too late to get out. We were off with a roar and raced down the main highway a mile or so, as fast as a Santa Ana tricycle could go—which was not a great speed by American standards—and turned sharply onto a gravel road. The drunken driver was having a fine time, speeding, gravel and dust kicking up behind us. My head started to hurt. I was thinking maybe going with this guy wasn’t such a good idea when my cell phone rang. I shouted over the sound of tires crunching gravel, “Dan! It’s not a good time to talk!”

The driver thought I was yelling at him and he slowed and called back over his shoulder in Tagalog, asking if he should let me off here, which, as far as I knew, was nowhere. I shouted that he should go on, and we sped off. In minutes we got to Barangay Marede, but I was not sure where the Agta settlement was. I asked the driver if he knew Oscar Gonzalez, the man Ed said to contact, but he didn’t. I was confused. The driver was confused. I asked him to take me to the house of the barangay captain, and he did.

When he stopped in front of a thatched-roof house, the driver wanted an astonishing two hundred pesos for the ride. Since the fare should have been about ten, I was of course outraged, but he said I had rented the entire tricycle instead of just being a passenger. We were still arguing when the grown children of the barangay captain came out to see what was the commotion.

A barangay captain is the local official, like a city council member. The people were educated young Filipinos who spoke English, and they talked to the driver. The young woman said, “You did rent the tricycle for one person and so you owe him a higher price than if it was a group.” I offered fifty, agreed to a hundred, and he drove off, jerked to a stop to let a passenger board, and sped away.

My two new friends seemed to know that I was coming, which was surprising because I hadn’t known myself. They got out their own personal tricycle, parked under a shade tree. I jumped in and we followed a narrow dirt side road that cut through brilliant green rice fields nestled between two mountains and picked up a few Agta travelers who had been walking in our direction. We came to a small stream with a half-dozen shacks on the other side and parked before walking across a wooden plank bridge. Most of the huts were ten feet square and elevated off the ground. They had tin or thatch roofs, but none had electricity. Six or eight skinny mutts lying in the shade of the huts, panting with their tongues hanging out, looked to be on the verge of starvation.

A crowd of children and adults quickly gathered. The son of the barangay captain said, “Laura is here from America to study your language.” Some of the people looked like the Agta described in the books, with very dark skin and curly, African-looking hair, but others had typical Filipino features. My textbooks had agonized over the issue of informed consent by the people being interviewed, but everyone here begged me to begin working right away. The Agta at this camp spoke to each other in Ilokano, another common language of the Philippines, because their various languages were so different from one another that they had to use a lingua franca to communicate. I was introduced to Oscar, who proudly took out a worn and folded piece of paper printed with the names and offices of his Agta council and ceremoniously handed it to me. I studied the paper for some time, respecting its obvious importance, although I had no idea what it meant, before giving it back. Oscar was thin and tall by Philippine standards, with dark skin, close-cropped hair, and wrinkled lips that betrayed his hard life and advancing age. I asked, “What language do you speak?”

He said, “Labin Agta.” My goal was to study Dupanangan Agta, and since a dictionary of Labin Agta already existed, there was not much point in writing down a few words in this language, but they wanted to help me—in fact, they insisted—whether I wanted help or not. I had spent six years training for this. A short elicitation session would be good practice and fun to do, so I started. Linguists have lists of basic vocabulary words that they use to begin documenting a new language, common items that virtually every language in the world should have a word for, but today I didn’t have a notebook. My professors would have reprimanded me for not being

prepared for fieldwork, but they were 7,000 miles away. Luckily I had my journal, and that would do just fine. I sat down to ask the basic words, and then I realized, of course, my word list was in English, a language that most of them did not speak. Luckily, there were a few people who could translate English into Ilokano. I spoke some Ilokano, but didn't know words like "lung" and "mosquito."

Unfortunately, linguistics by committee began to move too fast. The English-speaking by-standers were so eager to translate each word into Ilokano for Oscar that I barely got a chance to write down his answer before they gave me the next one. A few words into it, Annie, the barangay captain's daughter, disappeared. The English words and the Labin Agta translations tumbled together: "head-*ulo*-hair-*duddo*-ear-*talinga*." I scribbled Oscar's answers as fast as I could before my committee translated the next word from my English to their Ilokano to Agta to English. I asked them to slow down, but they were so proud to know English that they kept racing. When I got to the end of the first page, Annie returned with some treats, and we decided that was a good point to stop. I was tired already—no, I was exhausted, and my translators seemed weary too. I wondered how I would ever find someone who would not tire of this for hours at a time—and also have knowledge of the local people and a natural interest in language.

Annie poured soda out of one-liter glass bottles into plastic bags, and we drank out of them from straws. This was the normal way to share soda in the Philippines. Why waste individual cans or bottles when plastic bags worked so well? I imagined the environmentally conscious crowd where I grew up in California getting into this—except for the plastic bag-disposal issue. Oh well. Annie had also bought some hard sugar candies, but I left them for the Agta. I managed to explain that I was interested in an Agta language known as Dupanigan, and they pointed to a balding old man in the corner, the only Dupanigan Agta in the camp, and called him over. The ancient-looking, balding man was in his fifties but looked about eighty. His gait was unsteady, but this was my first chance to hear Dupanigan Agta spoken. The translation team shouted into his ear, but he couldn't always understand; he was either confused or deaf. There seemed to be a lot of "f" sounds in his speech, but maybe that was because the old man had no teeth and couldn't pronounce anything properly.

After taking ninety rapid-fire Dupanigan Agta words, I heard someone say that there was a third Agta language in the camp, so I took the same ninety words from a woman who appeared to be middle-aged but was probably in her early thirties. She spoke Iludan Agta, a language I had never heard of. I would try to get a full three hundred words later and email my professors in Hawai'i to see if they could place the language. It resembled the others but was clearly different.

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I was beyond exhaustion, and I had only taken 270 words from three speakers. It wasn't yet ten in the morning. I would need to build up my stamina. I headed back to the barangay captain's house for lunch, where I chatted with Annie, her brother, and the neighbors. Thankfully, the Ilokano I learned in class came rushing back. I knew more Tagalog, but since the Agta spoke mostly Ilokano, I would have to work with that.

Following lunch they stuck me in front of a TV. A television station in Manila was giving away two million pesos in a contest—about \$38,000, an enormous sum of money in the Philippines. So many people showed up that the station had refused to open its gates, and there was a stampede that crushed hundreds of people, killing almost eighty.

Annie invited me to stay overnight at her family's house and to attend a church youth group that evening, and I accepted. I am not interested in religion, but it was a good way to make friends. When I was fourteen, my local high school in Oakland wasn't very good, so my parents enrolled me in a Catholic school my freshman year, even though we aren't Catholic. One year of preppy kids, snotty high-school cliques, and mandatory religious services was more than enough for me. I spent my sophomore year in the not-so-good public high school. I researched more than forty programs for studying abroad, picked the one I liked, and I spent my junior year learning Spanish and making some wonderful friends in Valencia, Spain. It was the start of my love affair with language.

I caught a tricycle back to the Centro in Santa Ana, and this time I found a dial-up Internet cafe that doubled as the town cell-phone store. I guess no place in the world is truly remote. I chatted with the owner, Eden, who spoke fluent English. She had a spare room and wanted 300 pesos a night for it, about \$6, so I agreed to stay the next night.

I found a dark canteen where I could watch TV while I waited for my meal. The news showed pictures of the stampede, but a young girl changed the channel and we watched a soap opera about a woman who had two suitors. Both were Filipino, but one spoke English and wore slacks and a collared shirt while the other, who spoke Tagalog, was dressed more casually. Speaking English is high-status in the Philippines, and so it was no surprise who got the girl.

I sent a text message to Annie. She texted back concerned that I was at the Centro after dark: "Be careful. We will come and pick you up." I paid for my food and walked outside. Having grown up in Oakland, I was pretty sure I could tell an unsafe neighborhood in any part of the world, and for a lone woman after dark this one wasn't safe. I returned to the canteen to wait. I noticed for the first time a small group of young men and a girl in her late teens wearing a short, tight skirt and a form-fitting T-shirt standing outside the canteen. The girl followed me in and made a gesture to the owner and glanced at me. The owner said something that I couldn't

understand except that I knew that I was expected to leave, so I did. Outside, a shop owner and her husband pulled down a corrugated metal door. It rattled nosily, and she locked it. It was the last store in the market to close for the night. My Lonely Planet guidebook had said, “There’s no doubt about it, there are some real dangers in the Philippines.” I was beginning to understand that this was one of them. I was very nervous. The shop owners and their ten-year-old son paused.

“Do you need help?” the mother asked in Tagalog.

“Thank you. My friends will be here in a few minutes.” She was clearly concerned for my safety. They waited with me, and I felt much safer. We talked in Tagalog about my work. A tricycle arrived, and I saw the friendly faces of Annie and her brother. The ride back to Marede, this time with a sober driver, took about fifteen minutes.

The church was just across the street from their house. When we walked in I saw that the fellowship was all young people. They had gathered from all over the province; it had likely taken some of them several hours to travel to the church. A sixteen-year-old girl, slightly overweight and extremely enthusiastic, led the service. Her voice rose and fell and the congregation burst into a bright song. After the song ended came two sentences from the girl and then another song. She gave thanks mostly in English and then, on a signal I didn’t see, the congregation erupted into “What A Friend We Have In Jesus” in Tagalog. The pastor spoke in Ilokano—it was clearly a language that all of the kids understood—and they obviously liked him a lot. I knew just enough words to get the gist of what he was saying but not enough to get his jokes.

After a while we broke into groups to discuss strategies for being a good friend. I was almost ten years older than the boy leading my group. He tried to speak in English for my benefit, but after a few minutes fell into Tagalog punctuated by English phrases. The nineteenth point of advice on his list was “give your friends space when they need it”. He asked me for my opinion in a thinly veiled attempt to conceal that he did not understand the English. I explained that the line meant you should not call your friends many times in the day if they don’t want you to, but this was a concept that was distinctly un-Filipino. A handsome kid with an angular face and stylishly gelled hair explained, in Tagalog, that if your friend needed a space to sleep in your house, you should always give it to him. This was a good local re-interpretation. People don’t do things alone here.

The fellowship wound up around midnight. Annie said I looked tired.

“I’ll just sleep late tomorrow.”

Annie seemed confused, “But the church service starts at 5.”

I drifted off to sleep around 12:30 only to be awoken by loud church singing at a time I confirmed to be 5 a.m. I realized then that there were some disadvantages to sleeping in a house across the street from a rural

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Philippine church on a Sunday morning. We got up and dressed, and strolled into the sparsely populated holy building around 6. By the time the services ended at 8:30, the place was packed and the congregation had sung more than half a dozen hymns at a volume that woke all but the dead.

I took a tricycle back to the guesthouse, and Eden showed me the concrete outdoor bathroom that was not yet finished. It had a non-flush toilet with a large bucket of standing water and a ladle to dump water into the toilet after I finished. Another large bucket could be used for bathing. My new landlady told me that the maid, a young girl, would get hot water from the stove when I requested it. She showed me to a large room with a concrete floor painted rust red and walls that echoed when I thanked her for helping me carry my things. I was their first tenant, and Eden's husband Bill, an American from Tennessee, was still hanging the curtains.

The sparse room had beautiful wooden furniture—a bed, a bedside table, a bench where I could put my luggage, and a small bookshelf/dresser. It wasn't much, but after I put away my clothes and equipment and set up my laptop on the table, the room began to look quite pleasant. Eden had told me she would eventually install a hot shower in the outdoor bathroom, but things move more slowly in the Philippines than they do in America, and that promise was not fulfilled in the nearly eleven months I was to live in her guesthouse.

5 LANGUAGE DEATH ON PALAUI ISLAND

We had exchanged long-distance text messages for months, but Ed Pascua and I met for the first time on Monday morning at the Santa Ana city hall. He was younger than I expected, thirty-two years old with black hair, dark eyes, a round face that was quite attractive, and a slim muscular build that made him larger than most Filipinos. He wore the uniform of a white collar worker, slacks and a *barong Tagalog*, literally meaning “Tagalog clothes” but referring to a thin shirt with lace embroidery, worn untucked. He showed me a photo census that listed birth dates for everyone in the Agta tribal camp in Marede, saying, “The president of the Agta council is 56.”

“Oh yeah? I’m surprised. I read that Agta people don’t usually keep track of their ages.”

“That’s true,” he admitted. “The dates are fiction. The government wants the information, and we make it up for them.” I thought that maybe the Agta were onto something. American teenagers want to be older, many of our older citizens want to be younger, and popular culture in America is obsessed with youth.

When I returned to my guesthouse room, it had begun to rain. My phone rang. It was my father in California calling to tell me my grandmother had died at 92. She had been ill for some time but her health failed suddenly. “Your mom planned on flying back to Boston to see her mother alive one last time, but she was too late.” The rain pounded on the tin roof and ricocheted off the main road like bullets.

That afternoon Eden came to my room. I told her that my older brother and I called my grandmother our East Coast grandma because she lived in Montreal and later in Boston. I had only gotten a chance to meet her a half dozen times. I was getting discouraged, but then Eden told me that she spoke to some Agta people in Santa Ana who would be taking a boat down to Bolos Point the next day. She suggested that I go with them. I thought

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that maybe things were coming together for me here in Santa Ana and began to feel better.

I decided to show up at the pier the next day, all packed to see what happened. I bought a bunch of canned meats in dusty, rusting containers that were probably not nearly as old as they looked and an entire case of cookies and crackers. My cell phone wouldn't have a signal there and there was no electricity, but I'd brought my own solar panels. At \$900, these blanket-like sheets folded up like a book and weighed under four pounds. They were camouflage print—my only choice was between woodland and desert. I chose woodland camouflage on a whim, and I was careful that very few people saw them lest they think I was with the CIA. I bought a motorcycle battery in town, and Eden's husband Bill rigged a cigarette lighter so that I could plug in my equipment with auto adapters I had brought in my luggage.

I woke early the next morning to a brilliant blue sky, eager to begin. I packed my canned food, four kilos of rice and two of cookies, solar panels, a motorcycle battery, video camera, laptop, audio recorders, microphones, sleeping bag, mosquito net, compact camping towel, hiking boots, and whatever clothes would fit into my large maroon backpack that extended over my head when it was fully loaded. Eden, Bill, and I jumped into Bill's Hummer and rushed to the pier at San Vicente only to find that the boat had already left. I lingered for a while, unsure what to do next or whether I would ever find a group of Agta to work with. I spent the rest of the day reading journal articles on my computer.

I woke up at 7 to the alarm on my cell phone. It was Sunday and I wanted to stay in bed. I eventually dressed and, still half asleep, crossed the twenty yards from my room past tools and lumber to the squat concrete bathroom building. The cool morning air was refreshing, more so because I knew that the afternoon would be hot.

After my cold bath, I wandered over to the main house. It was large by Philippine standards, two stories tall, with white-tiled exterior walls and yellow-tiled floors, and it would have looked like a typical American Midwestern home except that the kitchen in back only had three walls. Bill sat on a bar stool at the counter drinking coffee.

"Hi, Bill."

"Good morning, Laura. Want some breakfast?"

"Sure." He didn't ask what I wanted. He always made eggs and toast. I sat down at the counter and watched him as he worked. Bill Allin was an Air Force veteran who served in Vietnam, then lived in Saudi Arabia for 22 years working for Saudi Airlines. In his late fifties, he was losing his gray hair and needed glasses to read the numbers on his cell phone. He was nearly six feet tall and had a lean build from decades of hard work. His skin was pale despite fifteen years of Philippine sun, and he was wearing his

usual faded baseball cap.

He said, “I had to fire the maid. She left work without telling nobody. I don’t know what’s with these people. No work ethic. I hired a new one.” Despite his complaints about Filipino workers, Bill was a good employer. He gave workers at his cell-phone store paid days off when they were sick and paid decent wages. He returned to his task of toasting bread on the griddle. Bill was a cynic—or maybe he was a realist who thought that the world could be a better place but knew it never would be. He spoke only a word or two of Ilokano and Tagalog, and his two step-daughters spoke imperfect English, although their English was improving daily, so most communication with them went through their mother Eden. After our initial hardball negotiation on the rent, we became friends, and now Eden refused to let me take a boat down the coast unless she knew my traveling companions.

Bill placed a plate of scrambled eggs and toast before me and sat down at the counter. His breakfast was eggs and Spam—the same every day that the store had Spam, otherwise the man seemed to subsist on toast and peanut butter. “Bill,” I said, “It’s funny. Whatever you and I do, Eden and the girls say it’s the absolute truth about all Americans. We didn’t go to church on Sunday, so Americans don’t have any religion. Then they think every American eats toast and eggs for breakfast every day because we do. But you know in just a couple of days I cured them of their idea that Americans don’t eat rice because I’m eating it like a real Filipino.” Bill laughed.

I thought that maybe I had found a small piece of America here at the end of the earth, or at least at the end of the Philippines, a place where toast was acceptable twenty-four hours a day. There was almost always a loaf of bread in the kitchen, and there was a friendly family to talk with.

On Monday morning, Ed Pascua had arranged for me to travel to Palau Island, a short boat ride off the northern coast of Luzon where a group of Agta lived. My traveling companion was the new sixteen-year-old maid, who liked me and asked to accompany me to the island. Bill said it was okay, and I thought it was a good idea since traveling without a companion was unthinkable in the Philippines, and she might be able to help with translating. If it worked out, I might try to take her with me every time I traveled.

At the beach, a young teacher and I rolled up our pants and pushed the boat into the sea. The sun on the horizon was pink and yellow, and the sky was filled with white, cotton clouds. The small boat was barely big enough for the teacher, the driver, the maid, and me, but the morning sun’s

reflection off the sea was silvery, and the ride was beautiful. I couldn't help thinking that the twenty-minute ride in an open boat in warm weather was a great way to commute to work.

They say that the Philippines has 7,000 islands at low tide. This was low tide and the waters were dotted with tiny patches of land with no name. As we approached the coast, a fleet of small outriggers was returning to the port. I guessed that they had finished their night of fishing just as I was arriving. The men stared at me; an American woman in a local boat must have been quite a sight to them. I smiled and waved. As we approached the shore, the shallow water was so clear that I could see the starfish and seaweed and rocks on the sea floor. We motored into a yellow sand beach where a boat was grounded and a few thatched huts constructed of intertwined palm fronds held up by heavy wood posts stood up the hill from the beach.

Jerry, the boat driver, explained in Ilokano to the Agta people who came down to see us that I was interested in researching their language. They agreed to help as today's informants—interviewees, essentially—and set a handmade wooden bench in the sand for me to sit on. I pulled my notebook and recording equipment out of my bag and set the microphone where I thought it would pick up everyone's voice.

I asked simple questions in Ilokano. When I got to "How old are you?" my key informant, Cesar, announced that he was ninety. I wrote in my journal, "He is an old man." I started with the same word list I used with the others, but suddenly Cesar got excited and began with all the body parts. He pointed at his foot: "*Tikad*." For clarification, I asked whether it was the whole leg. I gestured at my leg and foot, and said, "*Amin?*" *All?* There is only one word for "leg" and "foot" in most languages around there. He made it clear that *tikad* was only "foot." He kept pointing and I quickly jotted it all down—knee, back, beard. He got excited again and offered two more—testicles, *lahag*, and penis, *bugit*. The others were all giggling, but it was my turn, so I asked the word vagina—*sulaget*. These were words that I couldn't always ask, but they were important for comparing languages, and no dictionary would be complete without them.

A crowd gathered during the school recess. One young man, about twenty, spoke the same dialect of Agta. The two held conferences about each word before my informant spoke confidently to the microphone clipped to his tattered gray sweatshirt. I recorded 300 words in two hours.

I continued with some common phrases, but the men were unable to translate them. The Agta people on Palau spoke Ilokano as their language of everyday communication. I knew that if the people did not use the language regularly, it would soon become extinct. Language is a crucial part of the way a people view the world and retain their religion, their songs, their stories, and their history. Cesar was not a good candidate for a long-

term language informant. I would have to keep searching.

I bought afternoon snacks—sodas and cakes from a small store constructed of bare, unpainted boards—and went to eat lunch with the teachers at a local house. On our way, a tall young Agta man stopped me. He was cross-eyed and smelled of alcohol and I couldn't understand what he said. I looked to my young companion for a translation, but she was afraid of him and didn't understand either. He followed us to the house, and in his drunken stupor refused to leave until he got my address. To get rid of him I agreed to take his address and told him I would return. His note read:

Adam (indecipherable), Palau Island, Cagayan

He could read, write, and speak Tagalog and a few words of English, so he was educated by Agta standards, but he made me sad in a profound way. He insisted on getting my address and I wrote

Laura Robinson, Centro, Santa Ana, Cagayan

He folded it up gratefully without looking, but a few minutes later discovered my trick, and we spent the next ten minutes getting rid of him.

For lunch I offered the teachers the chicken adobo I had brought in a plastic container. There were plenty of vegetables, rice, seafood, and meat to go around. There was also plenty of laughter and gossip in Ilokano, Tagalog, and English. "Why are you still single?" I smiled. "How can we find you a Filipino to marry?" I smiled again. "Do you still have questions for local Agta folks?" I had been told by my professors about the ongoing violent insurrection by terrorists in the northern Philippines and the dangers of criminals and kidnappers in the countryside. There was definitely a need for travelers to be cautious, but all the people I had met were friendly and helpful.

After lunch one of the teachers said there was a meeting on the beach a short walk from the school. The meeting turned out to be led by a short Filipino man from a non-governmental organization. He said, "We can help you grow trees on Palau Island and help protect your beaches from being exploited by people who only want to help themselves." He got a mixed reaction from the crowd. They were used to NGOs, government people, and politicians coming up with grand ideas that didn't amount to much—it's an old Philippine tradition. In fact there is even a phrase for it in Tagalog, *ningas congong*. It means a sudden brushfire that flares briefly and is gone.

After the meeting, I went to the school and watched the fourth-grade class copy an English sentence from the board. "The barangay residents plan to rebuild the fences." The students couldn't pronounce the words properly when they were asked to read them out loud. The English lesson was boring; people have to want to learn a language in order to for it to soak in. Young children have a marvelous capability to learn languages. By

the age of five, all neurotypical children have sophisticated vocabularies and can speak complex sentences, although few learn how to articulate the complex rules of grammar that they instinctively follow. If children are exposed to a second or third language during these formative years, they learn quickly and can become fluent without any formal training. These children spoke Ilokano as their first language and had also mastered Tagalog when they were young, but the government-mandated English instruction was not successful because they were forced to translate boring sentences and had no practical use for the language.

At the end of the nineteenth century, after winning the Spanish-American War, the United States kept the Philippines as a war trophy. It was the age of imperialism, and the Philippines became America's first overseas colony. Over the next few years, the U.S. army put down a Philippine independence movement in a small but bloody and terrible war. Having won, America didn't know what to do with a colony, so it developed a unique brand of colonialism. America sent its preachers to convert the Filipinos to Protestantism, its engineers to build roads and schools, its businessmen to bring capitalism to the Filipinos and make money for themselves, and its young, idealistic men and women to teach the Filipinos English, the language of commerce, culture, and Protestant Christianity. Every school—and America opened many—was required to teach classes in English.

The teacher announced, “Now our children will perform a dance for our honored guest,” explaining that they'd won the Santa Ana Festival dance contest the previous year. I waited outside on a bench in the warm shade of the one-story schoolhouse while the children dressed in their costumes. I was tired and almost fell asleep, but when the happy, excited kids burst out, I woke up. Several boys in white shorts and flip-flops, with strands of white shells hanging from their waists, began to pound out a rhythm on drums and other percussion instruments. I pulled my digital camera from my bag and began to shoot. The smallest children, too young to dance, crowded around me, enthralled by the pictures on the viewing screen. A line of barefoot girls came snaking toward me in outfits that looked like they belonged in a 1950s rendition of *South Pacific*. They had matching white tops and skirts, and strands of the same small curled shells dangled from their gowns and decorated their hair. The dancing girls lifted woven baskets above their heads, and then they whirled and snaked to the loud beating, swinging their baskets to the front and the side. Was this a rice basket dance? A line of shirtless boys, in the obligatory shorts and seashells, marched and shook wooden spears with blue paper tips above their heads. Everyone was smiling as the pounding noise continued. I took photo after photo to the delight of the little kids and myself. The girls offered the boys imaginary rice from the decorated baskets. The dancers

parted and sat in a circle while a slim girl of about ten did a brief graceful solo performance until the drumming stopped. I applauded loudly.



FIGURE 2 THE CHILDREN OF PALAUI PERFORMING A DANCE ROUTINE

When the children had caught their breath and were sitting in the clearing, I had the teacher ask if any of them were Agta. Nine raised their hands. I asked those nine, “Do you speak the Agta language?” Not one hand was raised. It was a very bad sign. A language dies when the children don’t learn it. They grow up, and their own children don’t learn it either. When the grandma dies, the language goes with her.

6 AN AGTA CAMP IN THE JUNGLE

On Saturday a hard slanting rain that sounded like a drum roll pounded the roof of my guesthouse—terrible weather for taking a small boat out along the Pacific coast. I stayed inside and worked all day to prepare for the coming week. There was no point in meeting with the Agta if I didn't have new questions to ask. Sunday morning I slept in, which meant waking up at 7 for a leisurely breakfast and wandering over to the Centro, where I knew people would be hanging out. I had forgotten it was market day. People streamed about: fruit and vegetable peddlers, vendors selling handicrafts and services, and shoppers carrying their weekly supplies in cloth sacks.

I stopped by the cell phone/internet cafe to chat with my landlady and new friend, Eden. I sat in the folding chair they had for customers while she explained to me how her store worked. "Bill goes to Tuguegarao every Monday to pay cash for prepaid cell-phone service. We resell loads at our store. We've got an exclusive for the county—it's good business. Customers can buy loads as small as 25 pesos from us."

That would be about fifty cents in American money. I asked how much time I would get for 25 pesos.

"About three minutes of phone calls but," she smiled, "that's about 25 text messages. So everyone just texts." A customer wandered into the store, so I waved good-bye and walked to the next shop, a narrow shoe store owned by a woman in her thirties. The woman seemed a simple person, unmarried and very friendly, who didn't get bored sitting in front of her dirty stall all day waiting for customers. I told her I was looking for someone to travel with me when I went to the Agta camps.

She said she could help. She had a harelip and spoke in a way that at first made me think she was making fun of my Tagalog accent, but then I realized she wasn't. "I have a nephew who lives with me when he goes to school. I'll text him."

Within minutes Fidel arrived. He was a sixteen-year-old high-school student, skinny, with short black hair and dark, intelligent eyes. He told me he was good with languages, saying, “I learned to speak Ilokano in one week after moving to Santa Ana from where I used to live. And I can also speak Tagalog and Bisaya. Next I want to learn English. It’s a language I need to know if I’m going to be an educated man.”

His Ilokano was very good and despite my better judgment as a linguist, I believed him when he told me how quickly he learned languages. “Will you go with me out to the Agta camps? I need a companion. I can pay you a salary when you work for me.”

“I know the area. I can help you. I don’t want money, but I’ll ask you to buy me an English dictionary and teach me to speak good English. Can we go on Saturday? I can’t miss any school.”

I made the arrangements to hire him and as I left the shoe store, Eden told me she’d met some Agta in the market. They’d already gone back to their camp in the mountains but were willing to talk to me. I got the names and the directions to their camp then returned to my boarding house, where I waited with a leisurely cup of black coffee for Eden’s brother-in-law, out of his hammock for the day, to get his tricycle ready. It was Sunday, and we would only be gone for a few hours, so Fidel came too. Eventually Fidel and I piled into the vehicle with the brother-in-law, his wife, and two of their children. Eden called to us, saying, “Ask for Prima when you get to Santa Clara.” There were a number of forks in the road, but Fidel gave directions confidently. It was a shame that Fidel couldn’t be my guide on a regular basis. We passed some houses, and the sister-in-law signaled to stop. She jumped out and asked, “Do you know Prima?” They looked blank, and she asked, “Do you know a family of *Pugot*?” It was an offensive term for Agta which had the force of the word “nigger,” at least for the Agta. The husband, in the front of the tricycle, glanced my way and whispered “*Agay*,” a neutral term for Agta.

The man in the house giggled, “There are many *pugot* in the area. We don’t know Prima.”

We stopped at several more small clapboard houses and asked for Prima. The first told us there was nobody named Prima, but a woman named Priming lived further on. A woman at another house opened her door and said that we had gone too far. The third house said we had not gone far enough. The next person we asked was Priming, and she had a young woman at the house who was half Agta. Priming said that we could walk to an Agta camp from there.

We left behind the brother-in-law, Eden’s sister, and their youngest child. Fidel, Niko, my nine-year-old neighbor, and I entered a path between two rice fields with our new companions: the young woman who was half Agta and Priming, a large middle-aged woman in a tent-like light cotton

dress with a beaming smile.

Our intrepid crew followed the raised dirt path along an irrigation ditch, where clear running water cut through the rice fields and into a heavily wooded area. Fidel didn't need the help of our guides to follow the trail into the rain forest and we chased behind him. His step was easy; he had no problem with the mud and rocks, even in cheap flip-flops. He ran ahead and waited in the bushes to give Niko and me a scare. He reappeared at a stream to help us cross, then disappeared again into the trees while the rest of us struggled with the muddy path. We emerged into a small and beautiful meadow and once on the other side, squeezed through a gap in a dilapidated barbed-wire fence. In an open expanse with no vegetation stood an abandoned lean-to covered with a weathered blue plastic tarp, a shelter just small enough for a few people to sit under.

Priming led us along the edge of the jungle, and soon I saw four thatched shelters with slanted roofs and raised bamboo floors. There were a number of Agta people lounging about. The men were chewing betel nut, an intoxicating substance mixed with caustic lime, green betel pepper leaves, and tobacco. Their teeth and mouths were red from the stuff. Someone had told me that extended chewing of betel nut caused people to become cross-eyed like the Agta man in Palau. If that were true, though, the entire populations of certain Pacific islands would have gone blind millennia ago. Priming announced, "We are here with a friend from far away—from America—who wants to study your language."

The Agta man seemed shy and spoke so quietly we had to strain to hear his words: "You are welcome. Come here. Sit with us."

I sat on the bamboo floor of one of the lean-to huts. The man introduced himself as Rudy. He was dark-skinned with black curly hair and wore an army fatigue shirt, khaki pants, and no shoes. Rudy was the only one in the group who could speak Tagalog. Although my Ilokano was improving, it still wasn't good enough for me to communicate. A young woman, probably his wife, three older adults, two little boys in shorts, and two small girls in pretty dresses, dirty and tattered from playing in the mud, gathered around us in the small space. I began to elicit my vocabulary list. An old woman interrupted, her eyes wide and crazy-looking, and started giving senseless answers to my questions. Priming said to her, "Older sister, let the younger people do their work. Come with me." She led the toothless woman to another hut, where she turned on a battery-powered radio. We heard a romantic Tagalog song, soft and lyrical, and the two women did a formless dance in the dirt clearing.

I asked for the same 300 words that I had before. Part of my original plan was to learn how much overlap in vocabulary there was in the Agta spoken only a few miles apart. I was delighted when they discussed my vocabulary words with each other and I realized that they were speaking

Agta! This was what I had been searching for since I arrived in Santa Ana—a community where the Agta language was still alive and being used on a daily basis.

I asked Rudy nervously, “What do you call your language?”
“Dupaningan Agta.”

I was thrilled. I wouldn’t even have to hire a boat to get to these people. I could commute from the Centro in thirty minutes once I knew the way. This was the group I would use for my study of the language!

I shared my cookies and crackers with them and continued with my list, but they seemed to be getting tired. Some left, some drifted back, but Rudy stayed. I saw that he was intoxicated as he lay down on the raised-platform floor of the open house, but still he answered my questions. “*Ayayatenka*,” he said in Ilokano, *I love you*. We all laughed, and I asked more words.

I invited Rudy to come accompany me on the boat I had hired for the next day to Nangaramuan, but he said he didn’t have the fare to make it to the boat launch at San Vicente. It was 15 pesos to the Centro and another 10 to San Vicente, but he wanted a total of 80. I gave him 50 and told him to meet me at Fish Landing at 7:30.

“Can it be 8?”

“No. It’s the boat for the schoolteachers. They have classes to teach.”

“I will be there for certain.”

We said good-bye and I thanked him for his help.

Rudy replied, “No, no, thank *you*,” and I knew that he meant it. “You are welcome to come back whenever you want. We will be here.” Their language may be dying, but the people were enthusiastic about working with me. I was lucky.

Rudy would make a good informant so long as he turned out to be reliable. If he showed up in the morning, he’d have the job. My entourage and I returned to the main road along the same path, Fidel again leaping ahead and waiting for us to catch up. My feet plopped in the mud, and my flip-flops were so slippery that they were doing more harm than good. I took them off and walked the rest of the way barefoot. It was fun, and I was in a great mood.

The first written mention of the Negritos of the Philippines occurred in a journal by a Chinese visitor in the thirteenth century.

In the remotest valleys there lives another tribe called Haitan. They are small in stature and their eyes are round and yellow. They have curly hair and their teeth show between their lips. They nest in tree tops. Sometimes parties of three to five lurk in the jungle, from whence they shoot arrows on passers-by, without being seen, and many have fallen victims to them. If thrown a porcelain bowl, they will stoop to pick it up and go away leaping and shouting

for joy.

Monday morning at San Vicente, a gray dawn over the ocean. I told Jerry, the boat captain, that Rudy would be coming. But at 8, I left instructions at the canteen to send a text message if Rudy arrived and we pushed off. The sky was overcast, but it was not raining. At Palaui Island, I asked Jerry, “*Anong balita? Kumusta ang panahon?*” *What’s the news, how’s the weather?*

Jerry answered, “We’ll get wet, but it’s no problem,” and we left for Nangaramuan. On the open sea, trapped in the tiny rocking boat, the Agta word for vomit, *magota*, kept running through my mind. It was the same in each dialect group, but I couldn’t remember the Ilokano or Tagalog words. I thought that nothing could be worse than this, but then a frigid, miserable rain began to fall.

When Jerry jumped on the beach and pulled the boat ashore at Nangaramuan, I could have kissed the sand. I waved weakly to the small crowd watched our landing. An Agta woman took me to a wooden chapel and offered me coconut milk and fruit. I gladly accepted and offered rice and canned tuna in return.

I interviewed her and a balding older man. He took this work very seriously and chastised the children as they played noisily around us. The woman deferred to him on each word, but as soon as he left she answered my questions with confidence. At lunchtime, Jerry took me to an idyllic beach just a short boat-ride away, where we looked for Cesar, the ninety-year-old Agta man I had interviewed on my previous trip, but he had gone to the pier in San Vicente.



FIGURE 3 JERRY STEERING THE BOAT

I had brought my own lunch, but the Agta would have none of that and prepared a lobster caught that morning. Jerry said that they could get quite a bit of money for the lobster, which embarrassed me, but I couldn't say no. I bit into the white meat, and it tasted better than any lobster I ever had in California. I took a picture of the beautiful octopus drying on the line, so they pulled it down and threw it on the charcoal embers for me. I had

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memorized “I don’t like octopus” in both Tagalog and Ilokano for just such an occasion, but it was too late. I tore a tiny piece off the charred tentacles and placed it in my mouth. It tasted like delicious chewy charcoal, so I ate a few more pieces. Back at Fish Landing in San Vicente, I stopped in the canteen and asked about Rudy. He hadn’t shown up.

7 I MEET GREGORY AND GET A HOUSE

It was my second walk down this muddy path. Expanses of rice fields spread into the distance to my left and right, and dense brush lay ahead as we made our way along the irrigation ditch. I wore hiking boots and followed sixteen-year-old Fidel. Four Agta women and their children walked single-file behind us, carrying their sandals in their hands. Fidel balanced my landlord Bill's rain tarp on his head. A large machete extended out of his backpack, and a lantern—an old rag stuck in a gin bottle half-full of kerosene—hung precariously at his side. He easily jumped across the ditch.

The equipment of linguists in the past must have been incredibly heavy and difficult to lug around. When I was little, we had an old fifteen-pound tape recorder that was boxy, awkward to use, and inefficient. Now I had a lightweight laptop, a digital camera I could hold in the palm of my hand, and a tiny high-quality digital audio recorder that weighed less than a pound. I had them all in my backpack. It was lightweight and waterproof, adjusted to my size with small arm straps to suit my short stature. I jumped lightly across the ditch after Fidel.

As we entered the rain forest, he turned to ask Rudy's wife for directions, flashing the wonderful warm smile that had made me like him instantly. Amelia indicated to the right, and we scrambled over the rock into a mire of mud where vines intertwined with huge boulders, the path snaking between them.

We stepped over tree roots jutting up through the path like the gnarled fingers of old women and eventually emerged in a small clearing, only to descend into another muddy morass until the path came alongside a fence that looked out onto a sandy wasteland. Several gigantic water buffalo grazed nearby, and past them lay a dry river with round boulders sticking out from its bed even though it had rained for two days straight.

As we made our way along the dry riverbank, a small hut came into view. Three adults and two children in tattered clothes sat on the floor of a lean-to constructed of bamboo poles strapped together with rattan and covered by a slanted roof of dried brown palm fronds. It had no walls, and the bamboo floor was raised a foot and a half above the ground. The roof extended beyond the floor, and in that covered space a diminutive middle-aged Agta man was starting a fire.

“Gregory,” he introduced himself shyly, inviting us to sit in his shelter. There was not enough room for all of us, so while the others rested on the raised floor, Gregory, Fidel, and I squatted on a small patch of dry dirt under the roof. Fidel chatted with our host for a while in Ilokano. My proficiency was still poor, and I listened quietly as I got out my microphone, propping it in the dirt where it could pick up Gregory’s voice and mine, and we began. I wanted to explain that I would be asking them to translate phrases and sentences this time, but without a word for “sentence” I just started in.

“What’s the Agta for ‘Rudy’s house?’”

Gregory was a good informant. He even answered questions I didn’t ask. When I stopped for a minute and said, “Let’s eat,” he replied, “*Magkan kitamon*,” and I jotted it down. Gregory said that we could continue the interview after dinner.

I pulled a container of cooked rice and cans of meatloaf and tuna adobo out of my backpack. I gave Fidel the Philippine tuna dish and kept the American meatloaf for myself. He started to use his machete to open the cans, but I stopped him.

“I’ll use my Swiss army knife,” I said, opening the knife, but when I went to use it, my hand slipped. The cut was thin but deep from the serrated ridges of the can. I felt foolish and decided that next time I would use the machete.

I’d forgotten to bring a spoon, so I sliced out a piece of meatloaf and ate with my hands. Ilokano has a verb that means “eat with the hands.” Fidel was skilled at it, but my hands were meatloaf-filthy. When the Agta returned, I got out my pad of paper and my pen, and repositioned my microphone where it had been before. In just thirty minutes, I had finished all the sentences.

Gregory told me via Fidel, “We are happy for you to work here. We will make your own house for you. We want you to help us.” Gregory and Fidel talked in Ilokano as they threw the blue tarp over the shelter, and the Agta man left us for the night.

I asked Fidel, “What were you talking about?”

“They want you to buy them a water buffalo for farming.”

“How much will it cost?”

“I don’t know.”

There were no walls to the shelter, and it was cold. My sleeping bag was made for tropical climates and didn't stand up to the wind and rain of the northern Philippines. I finally fell asleep and dreamed about huge water buffalo munching peacefully on tall grass. I couldn't get past them because my feet kept sticking in mud, and every step was getting slower and slower when something scurried across my face.

I cried out, suddenly awake in total darkness like I had never experienced before. Rain fell all around, but I was dry. Fidel lit our gin-bottle lantern, but the creature that had touched my face—if it wasn't a dream—was gone.

I drifted in and out of sleep until a rooster crowed. I looked at my watch: 5 a.m., and the rain had stopped. I reluctantly crawled out of my sleeping bag and wandered down to the riverbed, but the dry expanse had become a serious river overnight. Reluctant to hop the fence and walk in the early light to wash my face in the river, I returned to our hut. My hand with the cut hurt. I ran my finger from the other hand along the edge of our tarp to gather enough raindrops to get my face wet.

Gregory and his family wore T-shirts and shorts in their hut, where they shivered from the cold. Gregory took a bag from a hidden spot in the rafters of his roof and got a second dress for his young daughter, who I learned was called Tibtib. Now with two tattered dresses, she was somewhat warmer. They came to my hut, and I, wearing a long-sleeved shirt and long pants that cost me more at REI than all of their belongings combined, sat and talked with them and drank coffee.

I arranged to return and stay for at least a week. We got the tarp down from the shelter because Bill would be annoyed if we forgot it, but we left the gin-bottle lantern. On the paved road we stopped at the *sari-sari* store belonging to Auntie Priming. She made hot coffee while we waited for three hours under a small shelter, the slanting rain obscuring the dense jungle, rice fields, and muddy road before a tricycle came to take us to the center of town. Back in Honolulu, linguistics wasn't this hard. My informants always spoke English, and we had spoons.

I arrived back at the Agta camp several days later. Gregory and Rudy were in the jungle hunting, so I squatted on the ground with my legs folded under me and talked with Stephen, an Ilokano man who liked to hang out with the Agta.

I didn't have a companion, as Fidel couldn't go. He was leaving Santa

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Ana to attend school in a village down the coast. I liked being independent, and I knew the path, so I went alone. Eden had advised me against it, saying it was far too dangerous, but I ignored her.

Stephen gave me betel nut to chew on, but it was bitter and tasted awful. This was a great courtesy on his part but not as welcome a gift as he might have intended. Betel nut is the key ingredient in *ammen*, a concoction of betel nut, betel pepper leaves, tobacco and caustic lime. Since Agta don't usually brush their teeth, the adults' teeth are permanently stained a deep shade of red from chewing the stuff. They spit out the red juice, and the packed dirt at the camp was stained with red splotches. I had carefully chosen a patch to sit on that was not rust-colored.

Stephen asked me about America and I struggled to answer in Ilokano, while the shy Agta sat and listened.

"Do you have Agta in America? Are there trees there? Water buffalo? The moon?" A teenage Agta girl laughed.

"Do you have yams?" I assured them that we did have the moon and trees, although they were different kinds of trees.

The Agta men returned at dinnertime, and Stephen left the camp. I cut open my sack of rice and took out the bowl and cooking pot. They boiled the rice on an open fire, the pot tied with rattan to a tripod of sticks—one pot for them and a separate pot for me. I opened a can of corned beef, and then, seeing that they had no food aside from rice, I opened another. Skinny Gregory and his wife, who appeared to be pregnant, and their three young girls all shared my rice and two small cans of corned beef.

We ate, I with a spoon and fork and they with their hands. The parents had gracefully mastered the skill, but the children had rice all over their hands and faces and quite a bit landed on the raised bamboo floor of their hut, where it would easily be swept onto the dirt for the hungry chickens.

After dinner they prepared hot water for coffee, and everyone got a good hearty laugh when I said I didn't want any because I wouldn't be able to sleep. After coffee, Gregory indicated that he could *mangisuro*, the Ilokano word for "teach." When I pulled a book out of my backpack, he asked if it was a Bible.

"Diccionario," I said. Only a linguist would carry a dictionary into the rain forest, an Ilokano dictionary I had bought on the Internet more than a year before. With my notebook in hand, a microphone on the floor near Gregory, and a flashlight tied to one of the rafters, I started.

"How do you say, 'We will go to the market next Sunday?'"

There was some consternation over where I would sleep. Since I was alone, I had to share with someone. The Agta, much like the Ilokanos, did

nothing alone, not even sleep, so I shared a hut with the young couple, Rudy and Amelia, and Dalsom, the slightly crazy woman that had danced with Priming during my first elicitation session.

The fire was only glowing red embers when I placed my sleeping bag on the floor and lay down. The bamboo floorboards dug into my back and I turned onto my side to try to get comfortable. I was still going from all the action of the day, and I watched Rudy take down Gregory's mosquito net from his family's lean-to, and by the beam of the flashlight cutting through the black night, tie it to the roof of our hut. The muslin enclosure was invisible in the dark.

Rudy and Amelia owned a large radio, and it played Ilokano and Tagalog folk songs as I lay in total darkness on the hard, bumpy floor and waited for their batteries to die so that I could dream about water buffalo and ridiculous disembodied sentences like "Maria will buy salt at the market tomorrow" floating in the breeze above their backs and lethal-looking horns.

A rooster began to crow. Lying there in the jungle in the pre-dawn, I could understand why some people might want to strangle such an animal. I arose and washed by the river, and sometime later Gregory built a fire just outside his family's hut. Watching this small, wiry man's graceful movements, I thought that he could have been a stunt double for Denzel Washington. He hung a charred pot from a tripod of sticks. Soon the water began to boil, and his wife served a breakfast of rice. Despite the three-kilo bag I had brought, rice was already in short supply. I opened two more cans of corned beef and Gregory's family and I sat in their hut and shared our meal.

After we finished, another pot was placed on the fire for coffee. I had brought only a small package of coffee that was supposed to be good for twenty-five cups, but it was almost gone, and the 1/4 kilo of sugar was nearly gone as well. Everyone in the camp gravitated toward the coffee.

Dalang, a gregarious man in his thirties who seemed to retain more of the traditional knowledge than the others, except in the area of language, began to cut long strips of rattan. Kanlab, Dalang's uncle, a small man in his forties, got a machete and cleared away the grass in the area next to the fire. I asked Gregory what they were doing.

"We are building a house for you."

I was thrilled. I rushed to grab my digital camera, took a few shots, and showed Gregory the pictures. He called everyone around. They got a good laugh at my pictures of Dalang and Kanlab. I continued to snap photos as Kanlab—whose name means "chop wood"—cut down a tree not fifteen

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feet away in the heavily wooded area enclosing the camp from the east. Gregory got up to join in the work. The three men cut another post and soon I could see that my house would be about six feet high—more than enough for me and taller than any of the Agta—and nearly twelve feet long.

Gregory began to hack away with his machete at the thick forest underbrush. The deadly knife had a worn wooden handle and a sharp blade that was 18 inches long and three inches wide. He swung it with skill and ease, and within minutes the bushes lay on the ground. Kanlab's wife swept the ground clear of the debris with a broom she had fashioned from the brush while the three men ventured deeper into the woods in search of a large tree appropriate for the main beam. They found one and began chopping it with their machetes, the chunking sound echoing through the heavy foliage. The tree fell with a loud whoosh, and the three bare-chested men emerged from the jungle with my rooftop tree on their shoulders. The pole was the perfect size. The screaming Agta children, as excited as I was, jumped from their new play structure to the ground and climbed back up to do it again. After Kanlab tested the frame for strength, the work was finished. All that remained was for me to buy a tarp for the roof.



FIGURE 4 MY HUT WITH A TARP ROOF

Later that day after more instant coffee, Gregory and I squatted on our haunches in the open dirt patch between our houses.

“I want you to work for me,” I said. “I’ll pay you, but you won’t be able to do other work.”

He stared toward the rain forest and in a pensive way said, “That is a problem,” adding something in Ilokano that I couldn’t understand. Gregory was the most patient man when it came to teaching me Agta, but he had no patience for my broken Ilokano. He could understand why I didn’t know his own language, but in his world, everybody but me spoke Ilokano. I got him to repeat what he said, and finally I understood that he wanted me to buy rice for the whole family.

“Yes. I will. I can also buy the water buffalo you mentioned.”

“We can buy it right here,” mentioned Kanlab, who apparently had been lingering nearby waiting for the magic words.

Dalang, also lurking nearby, raced to hop over the dilapidated barbed-wire fence and ran two hundred meters to greet a surprised Ilokano farmer on the bank of the river. A few minutes later he reported that the water buffalo was 25,000 pesos (\$500). Gregory seemed pleased, but everyone else said that was far too much. We would have to look elsewhere.

Saturday morning, Gregory’s oldest daughter, five-year-old Tibtib, came down with a bad fever. I wrapped her in my warm sleeping bag on the floor of her parents’ hut and she fell asleep, exhausted. I booted up my laptop to enter my data and the Agta gathered around me, thrilled with the portable computer, something they had never seen before. I brought up the photographs from the day before, and everyone laughed as pictures of themselves flashed on the screen. After they had seen each of the photos three or four times, they drifted away.

In the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, linguists worked only in the field, often laboring under difficult conditions. They recorded the vocabulary and grammar of languages all over the world and attempted to develop theories of language from their data. Beginning in the late 1950s, Noam Chomsky, the most important linguist of the twentieth century, changed all of that.

Chomsky postulated that there is a universal grammar shared by all of the nearly 7,000 languages spoken on the planet. He also said that human beings share an innate capability for language that distinguishes us from all other animals and allows us to learn that universal grammar. It was the beginning of linguistics as a formal field of study. Chomskyan linguists theorized about innate rules of grammar that were embedded in the brains of every human child. These scholars disdained fieldwork as unscientific and useless in developing their abstract theories.

Some linguists and scientists in related disciplines disputed his main

ideas, but, for more than forty years, although his theories and terminology changed frequently, Chomsky never lost the certainty that he was right and that his critics were wrong. He frequently exhibited his extraordinary, take-no-prisoners debating and writing skills by attacking anyone who dared to disagree with some or all of what he said and wrote. And fieldwork by professional linguists virtually disappeared.

A few professionals and some non-professionals, including those from the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the missionary Bible-translation group, continued to identify and record languages before they disappeared. But they were losing the battle. In Australia and South America, in California and Oklahoma, in Africa and Siberia, and in the Philippines, languages were dying before they could be documented. Cultures and historical memories died with them.

Many linguists realized that the subject they were studying and theorizing about was disappearing as they were talking and writing their articles. In the mid-1990s, the enormity of the potential loss, along with great advances in recording and video technology and the ability to archive large quantities of written, audio, and video data spurred a movement to try to document and even save the endangered languages of the world. My work was part of that movement.

Although I had done little data entry, and had not even begun the analysis I would need to complete before I could move on to new data, Gregory was eager to work again. I dashed through a couple-dozen Agta words with him and explained that I would need to work on my computer to create more questions. I had long since completed an initial 500-word list for the Dupaningan Agta language, and my next task was to figure out how the grammar worked, but it wouldn't be easy. I needed to devise many new sentences with precise grammatical distinctions.

Gregory left. I could tell that he was annoyed at me, and that made me annoyed at him. Then I had trouble concentrating; several Agta and I were crowded in my small and humid hut because the strong sun made it impossible to sit in the open. The dense jungle surrounding us, with its hypnotic birdsongs and insect noises, seemed to vibrate in the heat waves, and droplets of sweat formed on my face and arms. I lay my head on my backpack, closed my eyes so that I could concentrate on the complicated Agta grammar, and immediately fell asleep.

8 AGTA STORIES

I spent a couple hours in the morning in my guesthouse room on my laptop, preparing new questions for Gregory. It was raining again; the steady drumming on my roof was punctuated by metallic pings from a bucket catching a leak in the hall.

I decided to take a short break for corn flakes and milk in the main house, and dashed out the door and past the bathrooms as warm, heavy drops of water splattered over my hair and forehead, and I didn't stop running until I was under the overhanging roof of the open kitchen. Although I didn't eat corn flakes in America, it was becoming a new passion of mine in the Philippines. It was hard to top a bowl of cereal and milk eaten in a real kitchen after five days of nothing but plain rice and canned corned beef while living in a bamboo hut in a steaming jungle.

After a drenching run back to my room, I opened an email from Tom Headland, a noted anthropologist in the Philippines, inviting me to meet with him while I was in Manila at an anthropology conference the following week. He closed with a PS:

God bless you, and may He keep you in good health.
(Excuse my theistic worldview from coming in here, but they say there are no atheists in foxholes, so you probably won't mind us saying that at this crucial stage in your doctoral career. And gee, what do you expect from an SIL Bible translator? An atheist manifesto or something?) :)

I loaded my backpack with food, my equipment, Bill's large plastic tarp, a three-foot-long steel fishing rod I'd bought for Gregory, and walked to the Centro to find a tricycle to drive me to Santa Clara. My friends there warned me not to go into the rain forest in bad weather without a

companion. I stood on the sidewalk in front of Eden's cell-phone shop, protected from the rain under the overhanging roof. She was very concerned. "Laura, it's dangerous out there for a woman alone. I know what I'm talking about. And in this rain, it's twice as bad. It's just too tough for you to go."

"Oh, I know you're probably right, but I've got to keep my word to Gregory. I promised him I'd be there in Santa Clara today. I have no way to tell him, so if I don't go I will be unreliable and I can't afford to get my language consultant mad at me—who knows, he might want to quit."

I found a tricycle; there were no other passengers, so I had to rent the vehicle at ten times the normal fare, an outrageous four dollars for a 30-minute ride.

I was halfway through the rice field to the hilly part of the muddy trail, the relentless rain beating on my head and backpack, water soaking my neck and clothes, when I could tell that I had a big problem. My feet were slipping in the mud and I was making little progress. It was getting darker quickly, and I would not be able to find my way out from here in the total blackness of a rainy night.

Eden and my other friends were right. It was a big mistake to go late in the day without a companion in this terrible weather. I didn't know if I should continue or start back, but it was too late to do that.

Then I saw Stephen coming toward me on the trail. The naïve young Ilokano man who had wondered if there was a moon at night over America greeted me warmly, and with his strong hands grabbed the tarp and steel fishing rod and walked with me. With my hands free I managed the trail without much difficulty, arriving in the Agta camp around dusk. After helping lay the tarp over the roof supports for my hut, Stephen left to make it home before the last light slipped away.

There was still no floor in my jungle house, but Dalang and Gregory removed some of the bamboo floor from Gregory's hut and lay them in mine so that I could sleep there in this driving rainstorm. While water was being boiled for coffee, Dalang disappeared and returned with freshly cut bamboo, which he deftly fashioned into a table where I could set my dishes and food. He was a marvelous carpenter. I offered some canned sardines to Dalang and his wife, who very shyly accepted my gift.

We sat quietly in my dry hut and drank our coffee by the flickering light of the fire, surrounded by the sound of the nighttime rain that was now a steady pattering on the trees, the cleared earth, and the borrowed tarp above our heads.

I soon became aware of a soft and pitiful crying. It came from the direction of Gregory and Sisi's hut. It was their beautiful infant Babyanne. I went to their hut and Gregory showed me that the baby had a nasty burn from a hot-water spill on her stomach. I felt a wave of sympathy for the

tiny girl and rushed to the medical kit in my backpack for antibiotic cream and a large bandage. Sisi said to me, “I will put it on her later, after Babyanne goes to sleep. I don’t want her to cry anymore.”

When it was bedtime and Babyanne was sleeping, I asked again. They protested that they did not want to wake her, and so medical care for the badly burned infant was postponed indefinitely. I hoped that the baby would not get an infection or a major scar on her stomach.

As I prepared for bed, I noticed that Dalsom, the dancer, had brought her things to my hut. We would share the few square feet of floor space as the rain pummeled my borrowed roof. Gregory sang his children to sleep in his own hut just a few feet away, his voice melodious and soft, protecting them from the sounds of the night. When I was five, the age of Gregory’s daughter Tibtib, my dad used to sing me to sleep with songs that he had learned from his mother, and the tunes floated through my head as I lay there in the dark.

On Wednesday, there were roosters by 5, coffee by 7, and linguistics by 8. It was still raining like hell and there wasn’t much else to do, so Dalang joined the interview. I started by asking how to say “good morning,” “good afternoon,” and “good evening.” Then I moved to plurals—“the white dogs”—and some comparative structures—“the woman is better than the man,” and “the tree is larger than the leaf.” By afternoon, I had run out of questions, and I asked Gregory, “Can you tell me an Agta story?”

“I don’t know. I can try, but I don’t know.”

“Don’t worry. Any story in Dupanangan Agta is fine. I’m interested in the language. Only the language. It doesn’t matter what the story is about as long as there are lots of good sentences and words in it.”

“I will try. After we eat dinner I will do it.”

I sat in my brand-new bamboo-and-thatch hut with half a floor and wondered if this would be a successful experiment. To fully document the language, I needed to record vocabulary, parts of speech, and sentences, as I was doing. But to truly capture it and have people in the future learn it, even if the language is lost, I would also need to record expressions made during normal speech, along with songs and poems and stories. I typed on my laptop in the tropical rain while the theme from *Masterpiece Theater* came from Gregory’s hut on the radio he had borrowed while Rudy was away. I watched Gregory leave with his machete and return with firewood.

After dinner, I decided not to bring up the story because I could tell Gregory was struggling with the concept, but eventually he asked me to get my microphone. Dalang and his wife Eileen, Kanlab and Doreen with their son, Gregory and Sisi with their three daughters, and even my roommate

Dalsom crowded together in Gregory and Sisi's small hut. A gentle rain fell on the thatch roof, but even surrounded by a dark and dangerous jungle lit only by the flames of our fire, we were dry and safe.

Gregory took the microphone. I wasn't sure, but I thought he said, "This is my Dupaningan story. It was a very long time ago. Yes, a long time ago. There was a young man, a hunter. It was a time before the Agta ate rice," and then I couldn't understand anything else he said.

The Agta and I sat in the hut and listened to his words in the blackness of the night, the red light from the fire flickering on our faces, and when he changed his tone, I could tell that characters were speaking.

Then he was finished, and handed back the microphone. Sisi said, "That is so wonderful, my husband. Thank you." The others praised him for his story, but Dalsom said, in Agta, "I didn't understand." Even here in Santa Clara, they were speaking an endangered language. Dalsom might be crazy, but she was at the forefront of a trend. Ilokano was her language, and her Agta was shaky. She spoke Agta only when others used it first.

In the gray morning I turned on my laptop, but the battery was low. With all the rain, the solar panels had failed to charge the battery, so I only had about twenty minutes to work. I pulled up the file of the story that I had transferred to the laptop and played it for Gregory and Dalang, explaining that I wanted Gregory to repeat his own words to me slowly after listening to the fast version. Dalang, who understood my broken Ilokano better than Gregory, explained, "She can't understand the recording. You listen and say it back slow, and she will write it down."

Gregory didn't know why I couldn't just write what I heard, and so he offered translations for a few Agta words, but he didn't repeat the sentences. My computer beeped to signal a low battery. I would have to transcribe the story later. For now, I had to head to Manila, where I would meet with a bunch of archaeologists at a conference. I told Gregory, practicing my broken Agta, "I will return in two weeks."

Gregory helped me take down the tarp. I gave him back the borrowed floor. I guess I'd have to stay longer than a few days to earn a floor. I handed him five hundred pesos, hoping that he could make the money last for the two weeks. He told me he was going on a hunting trip for wild pigs and would also be gone for a week. I threw the tarp in my backpack, much lighter without the food I brought on the way in, and I set out for the road on my own.

I didn't even get out of the camp before an Agta woman who was visiting from another area approached me. She was obviously drunk, and she hugged and kissed me and said, "Please return soon, sister. Sister, I need money to buy coffee. I am too shy to ask Gregory for money."

I pulled a twenty-peso note out of my pocket, enough for coffee, but she pestered me until I gave her the rest of my pocket change, leaving just

enough so I could get a tricycle back to town. I started off down the path, but she followed me. She spoke Agta, Ilokano, and the small amount of Tagalog she knew, and the drunken mixture was hard to follow. The woman told me how she really hoped that I would be like Sister Grace, the wife of Joe McAlpin, who was teaching Agta people in Bolos Point to read and write and helping them when they had problems.

We eventually made it through the jungle and along the irrigation ditch to the road, where, fortunately, a tricycle was passing by. I flagged it down while the woman was entreating me to return. I kept saying “*Magsoli-ak,*” in Agta, *I will return.*

It struck me that I’d just used the phrase that General MacArthur made famous (albeit in English) when he abandoned the Philippines to the invading Japanese army in 1942. I jumped into the rear compartment of the tricycle, dropped my backpack on the floor, and called, “*Magsoli-ak*” as we rumbled away.

The next day I took the bus to Tuguegarao and rescued my passport, held hostage by the Bureau of Foreign Affairs for the exorbitant—by Philippine standards—visa-extension fee of 3,800 pesos (\$76), and returned to the bus station. A stout woman in a gray bus uniform with shiny metallic buttons and conductor’s hat said that the ride to Manila would be twelve hours, and would arrive in the middle of the night. Without a confirmed hotel reservation in that massive city, that would be a very bad idea.

I decided to spend a few hours lugging my bag around the dirty streets of Tuguegarao. I found a vendor selling fresh coconut juice and sat under his umbrella, which only partially shaded me from the oppressive sun.

My cell phone played a lively tune. It was my parents from California. I shouted over the noise of the street and held my hand to my ear to listen.

“We’ll be there at the end of April. Our flight from Manila goes into Tuguegarao airport. We can meet up then at—” We were cut off in mid-sentence. I was watching some of Tuguegarao’s thousands of tricycles polluting the air and sidewalks and streets, a rather lively form of entertainment, when I noticed a tiny movie theater.

I was hoping for an American movie, but settled for a Tagalog teen flick about a girl who falls in love with a rock star before realizing her best friend was her true love all along. Maybe teen movies aren’t so different anywhere in the world. The movie was half-good; I only understood half of the Tagalog dialogue, so I pretended the rest was better. It was clear why the other movie patrons talked on their cell phones during the film.

I caught the 6 p.m. first-class bus, and suffered through the twelve-hour drive, unable to sleep in the freezing air conditioning, arriving in Manila at

dawn. I bought the first newspaper I had seen in months. Nothing much had changed; the president of the Philippines was still busy arresting her rivals. I ordered two fried eggs served on white rice and a cup of instant coffee, ate quickly, and jumped in a taxi. The driver demanded a fixed fee, saying, “*Kasi foreigner siya,*” *Because she is a foreigner*, but I said, “*Nakameter tayo,*” *Let’s turn the meter on*. The driver chuckled, quite a change from my first night in Manila. He dropped off me at the hostel at the University of the Philippines.

Tom Headland and I sat in soft lounge chairs in the comfortable air-conditioned library of the Summer Institute of Linguists. The only sign that Tom was 70 years old was his hearing aid. He had a full head of hair and a jaunty walk that he attributed to having to trek ten minutes every time he wanted to relieve himself, a reference to the lack of facilities at the Casiguran Agta camp where he had spent the majority of his life.

Tom said, “It is certainly frustrating that Agta often change their names. I have a computer print-out here going back eighty-plus years with Agta demographic information that I developed. It has birth dates, deaths, marriages, and other important events. Some of these people changed their names three or four times over the course of their lives.”

I asked, “How did you figure out when those people were born, if it happened before you got there and they didn’t keep track of their ages?”

“That’s all explained in my book, *Laura*,” he said in a tone that was more fatherly than professorial. I was embarrassed because I had carefully checked his book out of the library at the University of Hawai’i and then let it languish unread for months under a stack of other books, all required reading, on the floor of my apartment in Honolulu. I could picture that stack in my mind and winced.

In a quick maneuver to change the subject, I slid a map from my backpack.

“Here’s where Santa Clara is.” I pointed to where I was working. Tom pointed to where another Summer Institute of Linguistics missionary had worked, and I could see why the dictionary that missionary wrote (but never published) had words that were different from the ones Gregory was teaching me. This area, though not far in miles, would be more than a day’s walk from Gregory’s camp in Santa Clara because of the rugged terrain.

Tom called over some Agta people he had brought with him to Manila to get medical attention, and they sat down and chatted about their lives. With my knowledge of Tagalog, Ilokano, a bit of Dupanangan Agta—and seven years of linguistic training—I could just barely follow what they were saying in the Casiguran Agta language. Tom told me, quietly, “Casiguran

Agta is being inundated with words borrowed from Tagalog. I don't speak Tagalog. I am concerned that I might someday become a stranger to this language that I have been speaking fluently for decades."

I agreed. "Isn't it a shame how fast the Agta languages are disappearing?" We were quiet for a moment.

"How much do you pay the Agta you work with?"

"Oh, we don't pay them. Once you pay them, they come to expect it. That's what our son did. He's got them spoiled now." I decided that it would not be a good idea to tell Tom that I was paying Gregory, providing him food and medicine, and giving him and his family additional gifts. But this was also a difference between anthropologists and linguists. Anthropologists follow people around as they went about their daily lives. Linguists ask arcane questions for hours on end. It would be hard to imagine subjecting Gregory to that kind of drudgery without compensation.

Tom treated me to dinner at the SIL house. As we were eating, he confessed, "I don't believe the theory that we will be able to find remnants of original Negrito vocabulary in modern Negrito languages."

I thought he was right. It's very likely that the earliest Negrito languages, which the people spoke before the Austronesian rice farmers arrived, have been completely replaced, and that there are no traces at all of the original languages left.

After dinner Tom and I met up again with the Agta, and Tom told a Casiguran Agta story.

"A young wide-mouth frog, abandoned by his parents, didn't know what to eat, so he asked a pig, 'What should I eat?' and the pig answered, 'I don't know what wide-mouth frogs eat, but we eat mushrooms.' So he asked a water buffalo, and the water buffalo said, 'I don't know what wide-mouth frogs eat, but we eat grass.' He asked a long-billed swan, and the swan said, 'I don't know what wide-mouth frogs eat, but we eat wide-mouthed frogs.' Gulp."

Everyone laughed. The mother of the Agta clan indicated that she had a story to tell as well. The light-skinned, gray-haired woman was blind, and there were four large dents in her forehead from recent brain surgery. She sat in the grass just outside the door, and the dim light from the room illuminated her face as she spoke in Casiguran Agta. Her words were rhythmical and strong; it was a beautiful language, and we listened carefully.

"There was a boy and girl named Jack and Rose. They were lovers. They sailed on a great, large, wonderful ship. And the ship crashed into an iceberg."

"What?" Tom was perplexed. "How did an iceberg get into a traditional Agta story? There are no icebergs in the Philippines."

The old woman said, "I went to see the movie Titanic. I am telling that story in Agta for you to hear." She continued in great detail, and when the

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

ship went down and the hero died, she asked, “What does an iceberg look like? Why a ship would sail straight into an iceberg?”

I explained, “An iceberg is an enormous white ice cube that floats in the ocean in the far north, where it is very cold. And a great big ship has a lot of trouble turning fast because of momentum. It starts in one direction, and it keeps going in that same direction. It’s hard to turn.”

Tom translated my words into Casiguran Agta. The father of the clan, sitting on the grass beside his wife, said, “That is right. I have sailed on big boats myself. It takes a long time to turn around a big, great boat.”

9 NUMBER ONE ON THE KIDNAPPING LIST

At breakfast I ran into Lawrence Reid, a charming retired linguistics professor from the University of Hawai'i with white hair and gold-rimmed glasses. When I was choosing my PhD topic, Lawrence suggested that I study a language with only eleven living speakers, but I worried that they might all die before I finished my thesis. Then he gave me an article that described thirty Negrito languages in the Philippines, saying I should pick one from northern Luzon, and I did. I spent the next two years studying Tagalog and Ilokano and learning about the Philippines, the Agta, and the Austronesian language family, but I'd picked the topic of my dissertation in an hour, without even considering how difficult the local conditions might be.

"What did you eat when you lived with the Agta?" I asked him. We were sitting at a table in a crowded cafeteria drinking coffee.

"I never stayed long with any Agta group, but I did live for six months with the Tasaday. The Tasaday were a tribe of Filipinos that were discovered in the 1980s. They claimed they had never met a white person or used modern goods." He paused, taking a sip of coffee. He obviously enjoyed telling his story.

"They still made stone tools. I was brought in to see if their language reflected that isolation because many people all over the world thought the whole thing was a hoax. They thought, 'How could any group be that isolated in the 1980s?'" He took another sip, replaced the cup on the table, and continued.

"I stayed with them for six months and confirmed that their language represented at least a few hundred years of isolated development. Now, what was your question? Yes, I ate what they ate."

"Even if they didn't have any food?"

"Well, they always had food because I brought it."

Lawrence and I headed off to listen to an archaeology lecture, and we stared in wonder when the archaeologists fought over whether there was rice agriculture in the pre-colonial Philippines.

“But Lawrence,” I said when the lecture was over and we were outside the meeting room, “There are similar words for rice plants all over Taiwan, the Philippines, and southeast Asia. Linguists have shown, based on the sounds, that the words were not borrowed but inherited from a common ancestral language. While that’s not quite the same thing as finding an ancient grain of rice, if they had a word for rice seeds, a separate word for rice plants, and words for a whole mess of agricultural practices associated with rice, it is hard to imagine that they didn’t eat rice.”

“Ah, Laura,” he said, smiling wryly, “Now you are being too logical.”

More than 7,000 years ago, people who lived in what is now central China developed rice farming. These farming communities were able to grow in size and produce a surplus of food—a rare occurrence in a world of hunter-gatherers. Large numbers of these first farmers and their families, over hundreds and then thousands of years, migrated to Taiwan, taking their agricultural technology and their languages with them. The hunter-gatherers in their path traded with these Austronesian-speaking farmers, intermarried with them, and eventually adopted their languages. The economic advantage of learning and speaking the language of the rich farmer-traders would have been overwhelming.

Linguists have worked out that a group of these Austronesian-speaking farmers from Taiwan colonized the Philippines more than 4,000 years ago. Historical linguists saw this theory as the only way to explain the great diversity of languages on Taiwan as compared with the relative uniformity of languages in the rest of the Pacific islands. Most scientists, except for a few old-school archaeologists, accept this theory now.

This prehistory, of course, leaves out the Negritos. When the rice farmers arrived in the Philippines, the Negritos spoke a language that has now been lost to the modern world. Over time, their languages diversified, as languages always do. Later they all switched to the Austronesian language of the farmers.

Think how different American and British English are after only a few hundred years of separation. Over thousands of years, these Negrito dialects spoken in different parts of the Philippines grew so different as to be mutually unintelligible—thus becoming separate languages. Today the 170 or so languages spoken in the Philippines all bear the unmistakable marks of their Austronesian heritage, much as Italian, French, and Portuguese all bear the marks of their Latin heritage.

In planning my thesis in Hawai‘i I had hoped to find bits and pieces of that original Negrito language, but I soon saw the futility of this approach. I would have to find many words shared by all the different, widely-separated

Negrito groups in the Philippines. Over the tens of thousands of years the Negritos had spread throughout the Philippine islands prior to the Austronesian arrival, their languages would have become very different from one another. Adding another 4,000 more years of differentiation after the rice farmers arrived, there is not likely to be much of that original language left. After all, how similar are the related Indo-European languages English and Hindi? They have a common ancestral language, and have been separated fewer than 10,000 years.

When I began working in the Philippines, I realized that the interesting question was not what the original Negrito words were. Instead I asked why the Negritos switched to Austronesian languages. And a second question: What does that tell us about the prehistoric interactions between these two groups?

As soon as I asked these questions, the answers became obvious. It doesn't require whole villages to be integrated for a language to be lost. The Agta are switching today to Ilokano, even in places such as Santa Clara, where the Agta and the Ilokano live separately and there is little intermarriage. One or two Agta live or study among Ilokanos, and they bring that language back to the camp, where it takes on a life of its own.

Gregory's daughter Tibtib was, for a brief time, playing with kids in the barrio of Santa Clara, perhaps while her father was working as a laborer on a rice farm. Now Tibtib rarely speaks Agta, and then only in response. She initiates all of her conversations in Ilokano.

The Agta are all bilingual, which is necessary because of their everyday interactions with Ilokanos, but one or two individuals can tip the tide of stable bilingualism in a camp or a community in favor of Ilokano, and it only takes one generation for a language to be completely gone. Tibtib may be able to speak Agta, but if Tibtib speaks to her own children exclusively in Ilokano, and there are others like her, a generation will grow up learning only Ilokano.

This is probably how the original switch happened. A few individuals brought Austronesian languages back with them to the Agta camps. There were great economic advantages and prestige in speaking the language of the farmers, and the Agta's original languages eventually disappeared. They weren't, of course, called "Agta" back then. Agta is a name developed within the last 4,000 years and now just means "people" in the various Agta languages.

After days of talks concerning prehistoric rocks, I caught up with one archaeologist who did believe in linguistics. Bion Griffin is a retired professor from Hawai'i, and I could just see the younger man in him ready to jump out of his body and start hunting deer and pig with the Agta. He showed me pictures of himself roasting a deer by the fire.

Bion and his wife Annie's research made the Agta famous among

anthropologists. The Agta women are hunters, and the Agta may be the only modern hunter-gatherer group in the world with female hunters. Not every Agta group has women hunters, but Annie accompanied some on hunting trips. They said she slowed them down. But that's the price of anthropology.

The day after the close of the conference I went shopping for T-shirts for the Agta kids, and I don't know why I looked over my shoulder in the store to see if Tom or any of the anthropologists saw me. I also bought a tarp for the roof of my hut, and at 3 in the afternoon I was on a red-eye bus to Santa Ana that got me there at 6 the next morning.

I spent most of the following week typing my data and expanding my Agta dictionary. Sitting alone in my room staring at the tiny screen on my laptop—my tie to the outside world—I thought about how I was the only American woman in the province. It had been great to be in Manila for a few days to talk with linguists and anthropologists.

I looked out my window and watched Eric, the new guest house manager, carefully hang wet sheets on the clothesline and turn to dump water into the washing machine, which started up with a rumble. My research with the Agta was going fine, and it was good to be staying with a family like Eden and Bill and their teenage daughters. The Filipinos in the Centro were friendly to me and so was Ed, the local social worker, and I was getting into a comfortable routine. But there was no getting around it: I was one of a kind in the Cagayan Valley, and I was feeling lonely.

I turned my attention back to my computer. I had just hit a technical snag. I had tagged the dictionary entries that needed rechecking, but the damn computer began to print a separate page for each entry. I didn't want to print seven hundred pages, each with one Agta word and a definition. I didn't even have seven hundred sheets of blank paper.

This dictionary-making program developed by SIL missionaries can make beautiful dictionaries, but it often has another plan in mind, and this was no exception. I sent grumpy emails to people who might be able to help, but no one knew how to fix it. I fiddled with the program all day without success. The next morning I began on it again, but it just would not work. For three more days I experimented with every computer trick I had ever heard of and some that I hadn't. I spent much of my free time playing solitaire on my laptop out of frustration and boredom until I finally copied and pasted all my data into another file, changed all the settings, and convinced the dictionary to print properly.

I also took advantage of my down time to send a CD full of my audio recordings, videos, and typed notes to an archive in Australia. The Pacific and Regional Archive for Digital Sources in Endangered Cultures, PARADISEC, at the University of Sydney collects data on hundreds of endangered languages of the Pacific Islands and neighboring areas with

intentions of saving the data forever.

I left for Santa Clara at high noon. I had hoped to avoid hiking in the middle of the day, but the sun was high and white hot. Waves of heat rose from the ground, and my baseball cap was little protection. As I approached a small clearing about halfway to the Agta camp, I saw three men crouched in the bushes with their faces and heads covered.

I hesitated, not knowing what to do. This could be dangerous. If they were criminals or kidnapers or NPA terrorists, I was in deep trouble, alone, strapped to a 50-pound backpack, barefoot with legs shaking from the heat. There was nothing to do but continue walking and act brave. The men stood. They were Agta. I was relieved, but I didn't recognize them until Gregory uncovered his face, and retied his T-shirt around his head.

"We waited for you. Today is the day you said you would come. We started to wonder if you would." The Agta normally didn't keep track of the passage of time, but they could when they wanted to. We walked together to the camp.

Gregory announced that he could only work with me at night so that he could work in the fields or hunt in the forest during the day. I had tried to suggest just such an arrangement several times, but apparently hadn't been clear enough. Minutes later, Gregory and Dalang disappeared into the distance with bows and arrows and fishing spears. Gregory's two small hunting dogs trotted beside them. There are separate Agta words for hunting without dogs and hunting with them.

There was a new family in the camp with a daughter, about twelve years old, who had had a small amount of schooling. She could write her own name, but she wrote from right to left. At her parents' suggestion, I began teaching some basic literacy skills to the children, but failed miserably in my first attempt. I wrote each child's name and told them to copy what I wrote, but that was much too advanced a skill. I tried again in the afternoon without success, except for the twelve-year-old, who I taught to write from left to right.

Bamboo floorboards don't stay put without rattan ties, and I didn't know how to tie them myself, so I worked in a house with half a floor. That was good for those times that I wanted to sit on the floor in the middle of my house and let my feet touch the ground, although those times were few. I guess I needed to adopt a more Agta-style attitude. Why did I need a full house when a half-house did just fine?

In the evening, four Agta men sat on my half floor while I asked them to define words that I didn't understand. We were using a gin-bottle kerosene lamp so that I could save the solar power for my computer. Gregory sat on the edge of the hut, half-listening and sulking because others were temporarily taking over his job, suddenly jumped up and shouted, "Kaparanga!" and all the men jumped too. Some scooted all the

way toward the back of the hut, and I was the only one who leaned forward and saw a small lizard. Kanlab got a big rock and dropped it on the innocent-looking offender, squashing its head.

“It bites,” he said.

Gregory nodded. “Poison.”

I carefully recorded its name in both Agta and in Ilokano and took a photograph before they gingerly threw away the green body. Over dinner Gregory told his daughters not to be afraid of God, and he asked me my religion. I told them I wasn’t religious. This answer had been met with incredulity by other Filipinos, but was not by the Agta.

He said, “I translated religious hymns into Agta.”

I felt silly. Of course he had. That’s why others had suggested I work with him. I’d thought I had just stumbled upon the right Agta language teacher, miles outside the town of Santa Ana, in the dense forest, but in fact I had a trained language expert.

“I worked with a woman named Christina.” I recognized the name, Christina Nickell, from an unpublished and incomplete Dupanangan Agta dictionary, an old dot-matrix printout.

“She wrote a dictionary,” he added. I didn’t know how to tell him they never published it.

“It’s hard to get. I’ll make my dictionary easy to get.” The uneasy thought came to my mind: What does a dictionary mean to people who don’t read? But I knew that if I did my job right, even if Dupanangan Agta disappeared from the planet as a living tongue, it could be reconstructed someday from the archive in Australia, perhaps in the distant future, by Agta people who wanted to relearn their language and find their lost culture.

After dinner, I recorded Gregory telling a short story, a realistic account of a young man going into the forest, catching fish and collecting honey and trading them for rice. I played the digitally recorded story, sentence by sentence, as Gregory translated and I typed his words on my computer.

The stars appeared to be close to us, and it was peaceful to watch them. He asked softly, “Do you want some coffee?” We sat and drank in the dark, and I knew that it would not keep me awake.

When I walked back through the Centro market in Santa Ana, all I could think about was a large, refreshing bowl of cereal. Eden saw me as I passed by her store, and she ran to catch up with me. “I’m so glad you’re back. I thought you were kidnapped.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, I’m fine.” We walked along the dirt road together, past wooden houses and wiry men and boys working in a brickyard, to

Eden's guesthouse. I told her about the wild honey and how the Agta were doing okay now that the rainy season was over and they had enough food. There was no milk in the fridge of the guesthouse kitchen, so I put my bag down and walked back to the market. I tried four or five stores, and finally found one with fresh milk, which only meant that the milk wasn't canned or powdered. It came in little square boxes with six-month expiration dates, just like it had when I'd studied in Spain.

"One of those big boxes," I pointed.

"No, no, take this. Those are expired."

I got the other brand of milk, and went home with visions of cornflakes dancing in my head. Eden was there, somber, waiting as I poured the last bit of cornflakes from the box and opened the new container of milk. It wasn't cold because these boxes don't require refrigeration until they are opened, but I didn't care. Something about my time in Santa Clara always made me feel lacking in nutrients. "Bill wants to talk to you."

"Sure," I said, focusing on the next bite.

"Because, you know, the police called us." I began to pay attention.

"They told us that someone from the NPA will come to our place. Stay here. They're planning on kidnapping someone here in Santa Ana. Maybe a government official. Maybe someone else like you. Police say whoever it is is the number-one target on the kidnapping list."

The New People's Army was formed in 1968. It was an anti-government communist group that killed Philippine soldiers and police and confiscated guns. But somewhere over the decades it had lost most of its political focus and these days killed its enemies and kidnapped government officials and rich people for ransom.

I'd listened raptly to what Eden had to say.

"They don't know who will be the target. They could ask for a million pesos. Bill says no one should give it because they kill you anyway. Bill's got a gun. You should be careful. I'm very, very worried."

I took a shower and a nap and only woke up to eat for the next 48 hours. The mere exhaustion of being in Santa Clara had gotten me sick. When I did talk to Bill he wasn't worried.

"When it's your time to go, it's your time. I'm still going to go out there to my farm in San Jose, if the rice got to be cut. I'll just take my gun. I really don't want to shoot anyone. I haven't shot anyone since '67 in Nam, and I only shot him because he tried to kill me. But you do what you gotta do."

But I didn't know what to do. I wasn't sure whether it was safe for me to be living in Bill and Eden's guesthouse, or if it was safe for me to be alone up there in Santa Clara. I did know that if I quit going to Santa Clara I

wouldn't finish my PhD, and it seemed like a bad idea to turn tail and run at the first sign of trouble. What would I say to people? "Well, there was a threat against somebody. We don't know if it was completely bogus. It had nothing to do with the Agta, but I decided to quit anyway."

The thought came to my mind that maybe I should just leave. Why did I decide to work in this country, anyway? There were lots of endangered languages in civilized places like Australia and even in California. But I had started, and I wasn't going to give up that easy and let a group of terrorists chase me out of Santa Ana or anywhere, so I worked on my dissertation and planned to return to Santa Clara in a few days.

After the Easter rush—when the guesthouse had been full every day—was over, a dangerous-looking guy checked in. He traveled alone, which was always suspicious in this country, and when Eric, who managed the boarding house, asked him his business for the guest book, he said, "I'm just here to visit someone." No one had ever given that answer before. The suspicious man was short and stocky with dark hair and thick eyebrows, and he didn't look at Eric but kept glancing at Bill and Eden's house and then back at the ground, as if he didn't want Eric to see what he was looking at.

He got a room near mine. With only four guest rooms, everyone's was near mine. He only left the boarding house to eat, and the next morning he went out with a large cloth bag. Eric entered his room to clean it, and a few minutes later came to my room and said, "Bill wants you to come to the main house and talk to you."

I found him in the open kitchen. He said, simply, "Eric found some bullets in that guy's room. I think he's the one. I'm watching him like a hawk now, every move he makes around here." I stayed in the kitchen with Bill and we both watched the front gate to his property, waiting for the guy to return.

He came back around midday, alone. I said, "Bill, he had a bag when he left. It's gone."

He said, "I know," and he started to punch text messages into his cell phone. One message to his brother-in-law. Two to his nephews. We watched all afternoon, and the man didn't leave his room, not even for food. I was explaining about my work with Gregory when Bill interrupted, quietly, "I think you should sleep in the house tonight."

I walked quickly to my room, grabbed my pajamas and a change of clothes for the morning, and carried them under my arm to a bedroom on the first floor of the main house.

Back in the kitchen, Eric had joined Bill. Bill told me, "I think this is gonna be the night. I hope there won't be trouble. I just don't feel like it tonight. Sometimes you're just not in the mood." Eric nodded in silence. We sat on the kitchen barstools as the sun set and watched a beautiful

butterfly.

“Look at that,” Bill said almost to himself.

I told him, “Did you know *kulibangbang* means “butterfly” in Ilokano? Words that start with *ali*, *kali*, or *kuli*, and then have two repeated syllables, always carry some superstition here in the Philippines. It’s the same in many Austronesian languages, the kind I study, throughout this part of the world.”

Eden returned home from working at their store and sat with us. I asked her, “Do you know about butterflies and any superstitions here?”

She explained, “There’s a belief in the Philippines that a butterfly that comes like that in the night is the ghost of an ancestor, but I don’t believe it.”

“What about you, Eric? Do you believe that?”

“No,” he said, but I thought from the worried look on his face that maybe he did.

Bill laughed. “It’s funny how superstitious the Philippines is.” He placed his hands on his hips, and the back of his T-shirt lifted up just enough so that I could see the butt of a gun tucked into the waist of his pants.

All the men, including Eric in the front of the guesthouse, were posted about the property, carrying pistols or shotguns, watching and guarding. The brother-in-law and nephews were in the open-air cabana in the front of the property, with no lights, where the family and I had sat and drank Cokes on warm afternoons. Bill and Eden and I chatted quietly in the open kitchen at the back of the house.

When I went to the room in the main house to sleep, Bill stayed awake in the dark, alert in a chair on the porch. I lay down in their daughter’s bed—my eyes wouldn’t shut—while the sleeping girls shared the next room. I finally fell into a troubled sleep but woke again, listening, and heard nothing but the rhythmical voices of nighttime insects.

I thought of the five armed men waiting silently in the dark and of the butterfly, drifting sideways with the breeze, and wondered if the quiet would suddenly be broken by shooting and shouting voices. I fell asleep and woke, again and again.

In the morning, the lone man with the bullets checked out. Eric and Bill searched his room but found nothing suspicious. Bill was almost disappointed. “That’s the last time I stay up for nothin’.”

I was tired and relieved and I assured him, “You were right to be worried.”

He answered as quickly as his southern drawl would allow, “I wasn’t worried.”

10 MALARIA AND PARANOIA

The rain pounding on the roof and the concrete paving outside my door made me think of Santa Clara, where the path to the freshwater spring was slippery in good weather. If I had been there, we could have been working, and we would have had canned food and rice to eat.

Now the Easter guests were gone—the good ones and the bad one—and with the tropical rain there was nothing to do but work on new questions for Gregory, add to my dissertation each morning, and each afternoon eat *halo-halo*. *Halo-halo* literally means “mixed up,” and in this case it referred to the Philippine version of a snow cone, with different kinds of fresh local fruit and Jell-O all mixed in with shaved ice and condensed milk, topped with caramel.

Eric knocked on my door and asked if I had any dirty clothes. I gave him a pile of laundry, and he went away.

Eric was perhaps the best small businessman I had ever known. He took his first meager monthly paycheck and bought snacks, cigarettes, gum, and small packets of shampoo and soap. Now we had our own little *sari-sari* store right here in the boarding house, but he didn’t have anything to do today, either. I hoped the rain would continue just long enough to fill up the Pasaweg River at the Agta camp so that when I returned it wouldn’t be so far to go for a swim.

When the rain suddenly did let up and the late afternoon sun showed through the clouds that drifted above the ocean, I decided to go back to Santa Clara. I couldn’t find a companion and so I had Eden’s brother make a kerosene lamp and packed my bags.

I stopped at Eden’s internet cafe in the Centro to check my email, and found a message from Sean, my former boyfriend and personal anti-terrorism expert. “Don’t worry about any vague threats. Be careful. Don’t buy anything. Not even a pair of shoes. Never let on that your family is

anything but poor. If you have any routines, change them often. But I think people will believe you when you say you don't own your equipment. You don't dress fancy." Thanks for that, Sean.

"Most kidnappings occur within the first few months of arriving in a new place. So you should be okay. But if you do notice anything suspicious, let someone know who will do something with the information." I figured this meant Bill, the man with the gun, and my father, who had instructions on what to do if I were kidnapped. I started to print a copy of some of the dictionary words that I needed to check on, but the power went out, plunging the stores in the Centro and all the houses in Santa Ana into total darkness. It was a regular occurrence with only one power line, strung all the way to Tuguegarao, serving the entire town. "The grid" didn't mean much in the rural Philippines.

The next morning I jumped in the back of a tricycle and waited. We could have left immediately, had I rented the vehicle and paid about two dollars in pesos, but nobody rents tricycles alone. Living like a local, I waited for an hour and a half until a Negrito woman, her husband, and their son, about seven years old, climbed in beside me. The boy spoke to his mother in Agta, his father in Tagalog, and to both in Ilokano, supporting my theory that most kids with Agta moms and Ilokano dads refused to speak the less prestigious Agta language.

The mother turned out to be Gregory's niece, and the family was going to visit Gregory and Sisi at the Agta camp. All the Agta seemed to be connected with each other in some way. I guess when your entire tribe is half the size of a large urban high school, it's not surprising. We walked together along the raised path between the rice fields, past the large boulders and flooded creek that were now becoming familiar, and into the jungle. The husband carried his machete and all his family's possessions—a few articles of clothing—in a small bucket.

At the camp, there were new houses and new people. Rudy and Amelia were back and so was Dalsom, the crazy lady who slept in the tree. Gregory returned shortly with mushrooms they called "tree ears" and bird's nests to be sold to Taiwan and made into the expensive delicacy soup that the Chinese believe have special healing powers.

The children clamored for the chicks from the nests. Gregory produced three or four baby birds, no larger than my thumb, that had died before they had even grown feathers, and Roxanne, Gregory's three-year-old daughter, played with the birds like toys while Tibtib played with their only mirror, a small broken shard of glass. The ancient Agta religion forbid the mockery of animals or the flashing of mirrors at the sky, desecrations that would provoke a punitive lightning storm. Gregory laughed along with his children and only chastised Tibtib when he thought she might break the mirror.

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

I had worked for days alone in my room at my computer composing questions and running through the heavy rain to the Centro in Santa Ana to have someone check my Ilokano, only to have Gregory tear through the answers. We took a break and Gregory produced a few watermelons, hot and sweet from a farmer's field. Sisi brought a bucket of powdered juice mixed with water, and we all sat and enjoyed the feast. The meal was tasty, but I'd remember it later with regret.

As Gregory and Sisi talked quietly in Agta, I caught the word for "widow."

"Who's the widow?"

"Dalsom. She lives in that tree," Gregory pointed. We were silent for a while and Gregory offered, "Me, too, I'm a widower too." I didn't reply.

After dinner, with only the light from my lantern to illuminate my friends and their visitors who gathered in the dark to watch, Gregory translated two stories for me. When the others wandered off to their own huts, my Agta expert was still willing to continue, so I began to read him my dictionary starting from the beginning. He made a few corrections, and when we quickly got to the letter D—it was a short dictionary—I suggested we quit. I turned off my computer, surely the only one on in the Cagayan jungle, and strung up the new mosquito net I had bought after getting eaten alive by the insects the last time. Tree-lady Dalsom lay next to the mother from the tricycle and her tri-lingual son in my tiny hut. I crawled in beside them and fell asleep.

I awoke in the night and saw Gregory whispering with someone, the red flames from a fire dancing on his face. I fell asleep hearing Agta voices I couldn't understand.

The next morning Gregory was still sleeping when I got up, an unusual state of affairs, but ten minutes later he was ready to go. I announced that I would be leaving that morning and he seemed disappointed. Both of us had expected that I would stay much longer, but my questions were finished.

"I'll be back in three weeks. I'll bring my parents—they're coming from America."

In the mildly sarcastic manner of one who knows that his culture is considered primitive, he said, "I'll show them what a real Agta house looks like."

When my backpack was loaded he asked me if I had medicine for "blood in the stool."

"That could be dangerous," I said and gave him some of my diarrhea medicine.

Back in town, I took a shower and went to check my email at the cell

phone/internet shop, and fell fast asleep after lunch. I had a fever, just like the last time I had worked in the jungle. I slept for three days, only rising to stumble to the main house for meals before returning to my room. I had to figure out what was causing this.

I sat in Saint Anthony's hospital hooked up to an IV, sighing as I remembered the juice.

I'd taken the bag of powder out of my pack and smiled at Sisi, telling her, "*Kasur ni Gregory,*" *Gregory wants it.*

Sisi had laughed, and when Gregory came home with the "tree ears," she showed him the plastic bag and laughed at him. He was slightly embarrassed for having asked me for such a frivolous thing, but he laughed too. Later, as we worked, Sisi came to my hut with a large bucket full of mango-pineapple juice, its golden surface swaying back and forth as she walked. We filled our cups, and the kids came around and drank some too. We'd finished off the whole bucket in a few minutes. It tasted so good.

After three days of hibernation and raging fever, Eden had insisted I sleep in their house, where she made me instant soup that I barely ate. In the middle of the night, the diarrhea came back. I had medicine in my room in the boarding house, but didn't know how to unlock either the front or the back doors of the main house to get out. Half-crazed, I turned the top lock this way, bottom lock that way, turned and twisted, and couldn't get out.

I slept for two more days and was still running for the bathroom when I told Bill that I wanted to see a doctor. The Philippines has a fairly good medical system and exports most of its nursing-school graduates to places like San Francisco and Los Angeles. Bill said I should go to St. Anthony's, the private Catholic hospital. He asked Eden to find out which doctor was on duty. She called and told me, "Good, it's the smart one from Manila."

Bill got the Hummer and we set off. He didn't speak until we passed the bridge.

"Shoot, that water looks nice today. I sure wish I was out there fishin'. You see the old Rodriguez place there?" He pointed. "Sure is quiet since one of them boys run their daddy off. Told him he'd shoot 'im if he didn't leave." He stared at the road.

"That old boy took off fast. He had a girlfriend on some other island. Bought her a business and everything. These men here, they don't know how to keep it in their pants. They marry a pretty one and are off looking for variety a coupla weeks later."

When we pulled into the hospital, it looked dead. No people about, and no cars in the gravel parking lot. A sign hung on the door: "No doctors on

duty.” I pointed it out to Bill, who said, “Aw, shoot, they probably just never take that thing down.”

Bill was right. There were several people in the waiting room. I filled out a form that asked for my name, birth date, age, sex, and religion. I left that one blank. Would they let me die if I didn’t have one?

A nurse came to take my temperature and found no fever. I went to see the doctor, who was even shorter than me, wearing a pair of green scrubs and a T-shirt. She said she wanted to keep me overnight and see how I was doing in the morning. Bill called Eden, who in her life before she sold cell phones had been a nurse; she agreed. The nurse asked if I wanted a private room for 750 pesos (\$15) per night or a ward for 150 (\$3). I only had 1,000 pesos in my pocket, so I opted for the \$3 ward.

This was a strictly cash economy. I went with Bill to the window to pay in advance for the room and the drugs. They must have X-rayed my wallet while I stood waiting in line because the cost was exactly 1,000. It was a dank room with four beds—a woman in one with a newborn baby, a woman around my age in another, one empty, and me.

Eden’s sister arrived for a visit, along with Nick-Nick, her two-year-old, who was a favorite of mine. Although he could only speak a few words that made any sense to the uninitiated, we always understood each other. He looked scared, backed away from my bed, pointed to his hand to indicate the IV, then moved his hand across his throat in the sign of death. We laughed.

After they left, I found that lunch didn’t come with silverware. Out of necessity I figured out that I could carry my own IV and hang it up on the hook in the bathroom, but the bathroom stank of urine and appeared not to have been cleaned in recent memory.

The next day I was released for a few hours to go to a lab across town, and I was thrilled at the freedom. I ran into Dalang, who had missed the bus to Tuguegarao, and I told him I was sick and had slept at the hospital and probably wouldn’t go to the Agta convention organized by local SIL missionaries. He said that they’d all had diarrhea, too, and I felt guilty for being able to afford the kind of treatment that would actually make me well.

Back in the hospital, they re-hooked me to the ball and chain that dripped sugar water into my hand. Every once in awhile they injected medicine straight into the IV. It was cold, and made my arm hurt. A nurse woke me in the night to remove the IV, and in the morning the doctor let me out.

The cashier said 2,700 pesos. Since all my money was in a bank in Honolulu, I called Bill on my cell phone. When he got there with enough cash to spring me, he tried to examine the receipt but didn’t have his glasses. I told him everything looked okay, and he said in a whisper that I’m sure they could hear, “You can’t trust these Catholics.” With that, I was a

free woman.

When I was in the hospital, Eden mentioned to the doctor that I was taking daily malaria medication. The doctor said that my medicine didn't work, and gave me a different kind. When I was discharged, I got two different kinds of antibiotics and ten malaria pills, a total of twenty pills to consume over the next three days.

The next morning, I jumped in a van for Aparri. I had to make it to an ATM and pay Bill back the money he fronted me for the hospital, and Aparri had the nearest bank. After being in the van for over two hours, I got a stack of Philippine pesos out of an ATM and bought some cornflakes before getting right back on a van to Santa Ana.

But as I sat in the van waiting for more passengers, my head began to swim. My vision got blurry and a queasy knot formed in my stomach. I was suddenly scared that maybe the van would have an accident and roll over, and who knows what would happen. But I couldn't get out and be all alone in Aparri, and the van was the only way to get back to Santa Ana.

The driver spent more time looking at his cell phone than the road but nothing disastrous happened, and by the time I walked to the guesthouse and turned on my laptop I was so nauseous and dizzy from the malaria pills that my eyes couldn't focus on the computer screen to do my work. I got a cup of coffee and sat out on the porch with Bill until well after sunset, listening to his stories about the RV camp and 7-11 he owned back when he lived in Arizona.

Off-key singing from a local videoke bar blasted through the quiet of the night. I asked, "What are the odds that every single videoke singer will be out of tune and flat?"

Bill said, "One hundred percent."

My appetite hadn't recovered since my illness, so I picked at my bitter melon and retired to bed early. The overdose of Chloroquine had my mind and my heart racing with each other. Paranoid, violent thoughts rushed through my head. Didn't I see on some TV program that malaria medications caused the Gulf War Syndrome, which made disturbed soldiers come home from the war and kill their wives?

I opened the door to my room and let light flood in from the hallway, and fell asleep to Eric's reassuring snores. I woke up the next morning feeling refreshed and did a web search for Chloroquine. Google told me, "Malaria medication used especially in Southeast Asia. Occasionally causes

dizziness, blurred vision, and nausea. On very rare occasions, may cause depression.” Rare, indeed.

The website said to take 100mg daily. Nothing about taking 2,500 mg in three days. I decided to put off the next dose until after lunch and sat down to work on my dissertation for the first time in nearly two weeks. After lunch, I took the four sugarcoated Chloroquine pills. 1,000mg and an hour later I was back on the porch with a cup of coffee talking to Bill. I closed my eyes because the blurred vision made me nauseous.

Bill told me another story, finishing with, “I worry about these girls gettin’ into trouble with them Filipino boys.”

I tried to reassure him, “I used to get into trouble, too, when I was their age.”

He chuckled. “Shoot, yeah, back on the farm in Tennessee we used to go to the barn with the girls, but we never went too far. We didn’t want ‘em to get pregnant. These boys here, they think it’s macho to get a girl pregnant. You see babies running around with babies. One time, my dad found a pair of girl’s panties in the barn. I knew I was gonna get a whopping, so I put a notebook in the seat of my pants. Pop wasn’t fooled. He said, ‘Nice try son, pull that notebook out of your pants.’ And he whooped me even harder. He had one of those belts with ridges on it. Man, I couldn’t sit down for three days. And them panties weren’t even mine. They belonged to my brother’s girlfriend.”

By the third day, I had taken all the antibiotics and had only two malaria pills left. I worked all day, took the pills after dinner, and went to bed early. The next day, I already felt better. My appetite recovered. I was feeling good for the first time in what seemed like years, and got down to work.

My dissertation was starting to look more like a piece of research than scribbles in the notebook I used in the field. In a few days my parents, were coming to visit the Philippines, and I would get to play tour guide.

11 THE BANAUE RICE TERRACES

Friday morning I was on a van to Tuguegarao—fifteen passengers crammed into a space for nine—where I wove my way through a teeming public market with stalls selling used clothing and kitchenware to the Bureau of Foreign Affairs tucked into the second floor. The girl at the desk informed me that my visa extension would only be 1,800 pesos (\$36), a bargain compared to the 3,800 pesos (\$78) I paid last time. She said I could pick up my passport later that afternoon, but when her boss waltzed into the room it looked like I would be in luck.

The Filipino foreign attaché was a distinguished-looking man in his forties who told me he was working on a master's degree. He called me to his desk and looked over my papers. "You live in Santa Ana? Do you know Bill and Eden?" Bill's visa had expired sometime in the forgotten past.

"Those names sound familiar." It wasn't untrue.

The man signed the papers, and I was free to roam around the country for another two months. I went to Jollibee and celebrated by ordering the worst-tasting lasagna and fudge brownie east of the Suez Canal, and I enjoyed them both immensely.

I took a tricycle to the airport to collect my parents, who arrived looking slightly disheveled and definitely out of place, with Hawaiian shirts and pale skin from the rainy San Francisco winter. Within a few minutes, we were headed toward the hotel in a tricycle with a sidecar.

We had reserved what we thought was the fanciest hotel in town for \$16 a room. In Tuguegarao, that got us air conditioning and hot water, but no guarantee that they'd work or that the bathroom was clear of cockroaches. After my folks took quick showers, we headed down to the street and my dad bought some fruit. The woman charged extra, but my dad didn't complain.

We wandered around the market and looked at the stalls with plastic

sandals, pig feed, machetes, fruit, and vegetables, and a stall that had a basket full of bugs that looked like cockroaches like the ones in our hotel room. Live catfish wriggled in a bucket with half an inch of water. We watched as one, still squirming, was placed into a plastic bag for a customer. We passed a boy wearing a Little League jersey with an baseball logo that said “Eastern Boise” on the back.

I was the guide: “The used clothes they can’t sell at Salvation Army in America are sold to the Philippines by the kilo. They end up wearing them in Tuguegarao or even in Santa Ana.”

Out in the street, we saw tricycles everywhere spewing clouds of blue smoke. They were painted fire-engine red, royal blue, yellow, Day-Glo green, with names stenciled on the front—Centro 07, Lover Boy, Jesus Is Love, Susan, and Bernadette.

My mom picked out a restaurant from her guidebook, but we didn’t know how to get there, so we hailed a tricycle. I got on the motorcycle seat behind the driver, and my parents squeezed into the tiny sidecar. The young driver took off like a shot, raced down one block passing every tricycle his underpowered vehicle could catch, turned the corner and stopped. We just laughed and paid the fare.

The next morning, at 9 sharp, our van appeared. We had two drivers; nobody went anywhere alone in this country. Within two minutes, we were out of Tuguegarao and speeding past cornfields on our way to the Banaue rice terraces. The driver beeped his horn every time a child or a chicken ventured into his path, and our car passed beneath an arch, its white brick legs planted solidly on each side of the road, bearing a hand-painted sign saying *Thank you - Ilagan Barangay*.

Just past the tiny Bagabag airport, the van turned onto the gravel driveway of the regional headquarters of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The compound was a series of low whitewashed buildings under mature shade trees. I picked up some literacy materials for the Agta kids in Santa Clara; my parents met the missionary linguist Joe McAlpin. When we continued to Banaue, my parents said they thought that Joe seemed to be a nice guy and a good administrator for the SIL. I had to tell them that I didn’t like Joe because when I was still in Hawai‘i, he had sent me nasty emails saying that I wasn’t welcome in Bolos Point, where he worked with the Agta.

We woke before dawn on Sunday to a noisy tapestry of Ifugao drummers, barking dogs, birdsong, and a church choir singing in Ilokano. Then a rooster’s call cut through the background noise like lightning through a summer sky; it was morning. The choir switched to English. It sang a John Denver song about going home to West Virginia, causing me instant nostalgia for a place that I, too, had never been. I rolled over in bed and fell back asleep, having grown accustomed to roosters and dogs after

four months in the country, but my parents were wide awake and at 6:30 they knocked on my door.

We studied a map over breakfast and made our plans for the day. They packed bottled water, mangoes, swimming suits, and mosquito repellent into their tote bags, and we were off, bumping our way down a dirt road that really didn't deserve its large black line on the tourist map. We passed short sections of pavement that ended before our driver could shift gears, twisting and turning through the emerald-terraced hills. The *Lonely Planet* guidebook said that these hills could only produce one rice crop per year and that young people were moving away to cities and more fertile land, but there was lots of construction—maybe the rice terraces would be saved by the tourist industry. We continued to rumble and bounce along the road barely wide enough for the van, and when I checked the map at a junction, it looked like we were halfway there.

Soon we reached a sleepy village with a few houses perched below us on the hillside and a bent, rusted sign that said “UNESCO World Heritage Site.”



FIGURE 5 MY PARENTS AT THE WORLD HERITAGE SITE

The drivers chewed betel nut, and my parents bought two Cokes and downed them right there in the *sari-sari* store beside where we parked. The shopkeeper was yet another nurse and spoke some English. Her toddler son said “Hello,” but whenever my parents answered, he said “Hello” again.

We asked how far the Ifugao village was, and the woman said it was a

five-minute walk down a set of steep stairs. We strolled down through rice plants protected by scarecrows—crossed sticks covered by a floppy T-shirt—and I wondered why Americans spent so much time building scarecrows if these ones worked just as well. Maybe those nice scarecrows were just the ones they had us city kids make for Halloween.

We passed a stand selling Ifugao carvings and dress. “You try it on. We’ll take picture. Traditional Ifugao costume.” The woman pointed to a man who had stripped down and hastily wrapped the Ifugao loincloth over his underwear. We declined and continued to descend into the traditional Ifugao village with a Catholic church and a restaurant for tourists. The restaurant was closed because it was Sunday morning and almost everyone but the loincloth vendors were in church. The houses had thatched roofs like the Agta, but were completely enclosed and raised four or five feet off the ground, so that they needed ladders to get in. The walls were made of bamboo and had electrical meters on the outside.

We started back up the steps and my exuberant mother exclaimed, “I’ve got to have a prize!” as she stopped to buy a tiny wooden water buffalo from the loincloth vendor. A few more steps and we paused to watch a dragonfly with red-and-black velvet wings fly along the trail. I wondered what it was called in Ifugao and how I could ever get a picture of such a thing to put in my dictionary. After a rest stop, we got to the top of the hill and, sweating, woke our drivers from a nap.

Our van wound its way back through the now-familiar dust-choked and pitted roads to a waterfall. We paid the ten-peso entry fee and found ourselves at a crowded children’s swimming hole. The waterfall was less than two feet tall. We pulled out the tourist guide and found the description again.

“The majestic waterfall flows into a refreshing swimming hole in this secluded paradise.” I need to get that guy on my PR team.

My dad walked carefully down a stone ramp, only to slip on moss and plop into the water on his butt. The children smiled and politely looked away. We watched the kids as they played on patched inner tubes and tossed around a basketball imprinted with a Chicago Cubs logo. The drivers asked what our plans were. I explained that we would go swimming and then go back to take a shower at the hotel, but they didn’t understand. There is only one word in Ilokano that means “play in the water” and “take a bath.” So we would *agdigos* and then we would *agdigos*. Crazy Americans.

Over dinner later, my dad told me, “You didn’t get your ability in languages from my side of the family. My father once went to Montreal when he was young. He had this heavy New York accent and he told me years later, ‘Ya know day don’t speak English thea. As soon as I heaad one word from those Frenchies I skedaddled out of thea as fast as my two legs could carry me.’ He never left America again.”

So I guess I inherited that from my mom's side of the family. Her grandfather, Arthur Whittam, was a professor of Romance languages at Harvard. Her other grandfather, Randolph Howard, was a missionary from 1910 to 1924. He wrote a book called *Baptists in Burma*, in which he said, "It is rarely possible for one of the West to win one of the East to the Master, except by the channel of that man's mother tongue."

My great-grandfather was the president of a Baptist school in Rangoon and, just like the Summer Institute of Linguistics does now, he had the Bible translated into the local language. My aunt, a professor at the University of London, visited the school more than seventy-five years later as part of her archaeological fieldwork. She found everything changed. But a few old people remembered my great-grandfather, and said that without Randolph Howard, their generation, especially the women, would not have been educated.

After dinner we sat on a long, leather-padded bench in the cavernous lobby of a hotel that reminded me of the one that haunts Jack Nicholson in *The Shining*. We waited for a cultural show to begin while WWF wrestling blared away on a 26-inch TV. The small children were so disappointed when the TV was turned off that they searched the set for the hidden power switch, but the hotel clerks had taken the remote.

The performers entered the lobby in T-shirts that they removed to reveal the bright-red woven material of their traditional dress. A woman explained that the men wore the wrapped loincloth and that women of different classes wore distinctive skirts. She made no mention of the tops they wore, because the native women probably had been topless, although the women in this performance wore simple white shirts of a traditional material.

In the first festival dance, the men and women followed each other tamely in a circle. Only one of the dancers really excelled, and this powerful, handsome young man waved his hand and jumped from foot to foot as the oldest man of the group beat a metal drum. I wondered why they didn't get better dancers for the show, but when they finished dancing, they showed their real talents.

The women sang in a beautiful harmony in Ifugao, a language with "P" and other soft sounds that were absent in Tagalog, Ilokano and Agta. Next, one of the men who was a particularly poor dancer proved his worth by playing a love song on a small nose flute. They finished with two more traditional dances, one which, they announced, was performed when a murder was avenged.

The Ifugao had been ferocious warriors, and within the lifetimes of the oldest men, there were some who claimed to have cut off the heads of their defeated rivals, including those of some Japanese soldiers during World War II. We were assured that the Ifugao were a peace-loving people, but I

wondered how they still knew the dance if revenge killing was so rare.

The second dance was for the butchering of a pig, and the dancer imitated the squealing pig so well that you knew he had killed a few in his life. When he finished, the dancer walked straight to my father and invited him to join the dance. One of the women invited me onto the floor, and soon my parents and I were part of an Ifugao dance festival. It was fun, if somewhat inauthentic, and when the cultural presentation adjourned, we were invigorated enough to walk back to our hotel, which was fortunate because the street was deserted of tricycle taxis.

The next morning we sat on the balcony of our hotel and watched the sunrise. Clusters of tin-roofed houses dotted the road as it twisted down the hill. Beyond the town, small rice fields intertwined like a green jigsaw puzzle that extended up the next hill in terraced steps. At its crest began dense rain forest, more black than green in the morning light. White smoke rose from the controlled fires of burning rice hulks. The smoke spread through the sky and colored the next range of hills gray-green, and the next range white. Some seventy-five miles away, sketched low against the sky, silhouetted in smoky blue, stood the Sierra Madre Mountains, home for most of the Agta and a hiding place for the communist New People's Army guerillas.

Many months later, after I returned to America, I read in a newspaper that American Peace Corps volunteer Julia Campbell, walking alone on a trail from Banaue to a nearby village, had been discovered brutally murdered and buried in a shallow grave. A stray dog uncovered her body by digging up one of her feet. The authorities said that they suspected foul play, but later claimed that the NPA guerillas couldn't possibly be the murderers because the Philippine government had "eliminated them from the area." After a few days, a local woodcarver confessed on television to beating the American woman to death, although nobody was quite sure of his motive.

12 MY PROTECTOR

In 1866, the Société de Linguistique de Paris declared that it would not accept papers speculating on the unknowable subject of the origins of human language. Linguists throughout the world agreed, and all investigations into the topic ceased for more than a century.

Recent research into the evolution of human language has reopened the topic, with interesting results. While it is clear that humans have an amazing capability for language that allows very young children to speak one or more languages fluently, studies are showing that chimpanzees, dolphins, elephants, and even a few birds exhibit some of the capabilities of human language. Almost everyone who has had a pet dog knows, and research has confirmed, that dogs understand many human words and phrases.

New insight into the functions of the brain and the mapping of the human genome have revealed many complex and interrelated factors that lead to the ability of humans to process language. These findings, along with the animal research, have led some scientists to postulate that human language may have evolved over a very long period of time with no single evolutionary leap. This is in contrast to the view championed by MIT linguist Noam Chomsky, who says that humans have a common “universal grammar” present in the brain at birth and that this innate ability is fundamentally different from the communicative abilities of other species. My research, and that of other linguists documenting endangered languages, is adding to the debate by showing the incredible diversity of human languages, variation that runs contrary to the notion of a universal grammar.

The heat was oppressive as I led my parents along the levee that separated the flooded rice paddies. In a distant field, a farmer in a floppy

straw hat rode bareback on a water buffalo.

We were loaded down. I had brought presents with me from Hawai'i, but had never given them away, so I asked my parents to give them to the Agta as gifts from America. It wouldn't matter that the gifts were from Hawai'i and my parents were from California, a small benefit of working with people who didn't know how to read.

At a place where the levee had recently been reinforced, my foot sunk in fresh mud to my ankle. I took off my flip-flops and continued with them in my hand. My parents' shorts and shoes were caked with mud. A dozen beet-red dragonflies hovered over the water in the ditch that ran along the path. They darted back and forth, dancing *pas de deux* with their own black shadows reflected from the water. A group of young men threshing rice a hundred yards away returned our waves.

We entered the dense rain forest and my mother stopped to rest. My father removed his hat as we walked in the shade, but replaced it on his head when we entered an open meadow where a half-dozen water buffalo and their calves grazed. Up close, they were massive animals with curved horns, long and sharp and wicked looking.

The terrain changed again as the path turned to run parallel to the now-familiar dry riverbed of bleached stones and sand. We climbed over the old barbed-wire fence, the barbs covered with an empty cloth sack, and I saw the ashes of the field the Agta had burned for farming. The first hut came into view.

"This is it," I said over my shoulder as Tibtib and her friends came running to greet me.

The sun beat down relentlessly, and when we got to my hut, my parents sat on my bamboo floor, resting in the shade. Gregory was fifty yards away, chopping down the last remaining sapling stumps in the burned field he was preparing for planting. He had been waiting for us, and came to meet my parents. He sat on his heels on the parched earth under the roof of my hut and shyly looked away. His wife Sisi was more pregnant than ever, and I asked when she was due. He said, "Two more weeks."

The kids stole glances at my parents when they thought they weren't looking. My father had printed out some of my pictures at his office, and he pulled them out of his bag to show them one by one. The Agta were thrilled, passing them around and giggling. Sisi took the folder of photographs back to her house, and the neighbors and kids gathered around her to look at them again.

Gregory put them away carefully, and for the next few days, he would take them out to show friends who hadn't seen them yet. Family photos, even printouts, are hard to come by in the jungle.

After the commotion calmed down, my father took individual portraits of each member of Gregory's family with his camera. Gregory boiled water

for coffee and Doreen swept the debris from the dirt in the half of my house without a floor. My father said, "This is just the way we welcome guests. Sweep the floor and offer them coffee." My parents presented the gifts: stuffed toys and T-shirts from Hawai'i, which were well-received aside from the T-shirts being two or three sizes too big for the diminutive Agta. When Gregory and I started to work in my hut, my father pulled out a video camera, but the kids were so excited to see the video screen that Gregory and I couldn't concentrate over their squeals. They took turns looking at the image and running behind Gregory to be in the picture while the watchers called out who was being filmed.

To allow us to get something accomplished, my mother took the kids to Sisi and Gregory's hut to play a hand-slapping game, but the kids' laughs and screams were so loud we still had trouble working. My mom and the kids were exiled to the path to play chase and hide and seek. That game was just as popular, but when they tired of it, she pulled out the SIL readers and the kids taught her some Agta. Mom pointed at a picture of a snake and read the word *ulag*. The kids looked at the picture and corrected her pronunciation. My mom asked me to translate "The Itsy-Bitsy Spider" into Agta, but it was beyond my skills and wouldn't have rhymed in Agta anyway, so she sang it untranslated, and they sang her children's songs in Ilokano. We gave up trying to work and had some lunch.

After lunch, my father wanted to have a serious chat with Gregory. Before they arrived in the Philippines, I had emailed him about my NPA scare, but we hadn't wanted to worry my mom. My father had decided to ask Gregory to protect me.

"Laura is my daughter and I am very proud of her." I struggled to translate into Agta. "You are a father, too, and you also have beautiful daughters." I translated again. Gregory listened intently to my father and then to me.

"I'm concerned," my dad started. What was the Agta for "concerned?" Worried? Afraid? "*Manteng bikuna*," I translated, "He is afraid."

"There are a lot of bad people out there." I struggled again. The word for people is "Agta," but I didn't want to say there are a lot of bad Agta out there, so I used an Ilokano. "The NPA..." That one didn't need translating. Gregory knew who the NPA were. "If there are any bad people, if the NPA wants to harm Laura, I want you to go to the Centro to warn her."

My dad thought that the father-daughter relationship was universal, whether the father was a labor-union director from California or a hunter-gatherer in the Philippine rain forest, and that most fathers wanted to protect their daughters. But I had my doubts that these two fathers, separated by enormous linguistic and cultural gaps, understood each other. I translated, but, Gregory asked, "When are we going to town, and when are we coming back?"

“Only if there is a problem,” I explained, but I was pretty sure that he misunderstood my translation. Gregory was worried that something bad had happened and that my father was angry. I tried to appease him. “My father reads in the newspaper that bad things happen in Manila, and he gets scared. It’s okay.”

I thought that even if Gregory didn’t understand, my father felt better, so it was worth the effort, but it later became obvious that I had been mistaken. Gregory knew what my father was trying to say.

Our boat rode swells twenty feet high, then dropped into the troughs—my parents thought it was fun—and we soon reached a beautiful white-sand beach with coral reefs and lined with palm trees. My dad slipped as he jumped from our boat to the sandy beach and got what was likely the only pair of classic ghost-white Reebok walking shoes in the northern Philippines soaking wet. I jumped clear to the beach and so did my mom, with Jerry the boat driver holding her arm. A small yacht bobbed just beyond the reef and a group of tourists from Manila lounged on the beach. The luxury tour had brought its own beach chairs and logo-covered umbrellas.

A large local group taking an early lunch lounged in a thatched hut that had been built for visitors. We headed for another, half-finished hut and laid our towels in the sand, but no sooner had we done so than a group of men rushed out to help us. They threw a tarp over the unfinished part of the roof, collected palm leaves to lay on the ground, and placed a mat over the leaves to create a comfortable cushion to lie down on. My parents practiced the single phrase in Ilokano I had taught them: “*ag-ya-ma-nak*,” “thank you,” and one man humbly explained in Ilokano that he was the caretaker.

The tourists were soon ferried out to their yacht in a speedboat set up with lounge chairs so they could ride in comfort. We swam in the crystal-blue waters and retired to our mat in the makeshift hut, drifting off to sleep until we were awoken by the sounds of an approaching boat. The workers were getting ready to leave for the day, and a large man in his forties yelled “Good-bye, Laura!” in English.

I had no idea who he was, but I waved until the workers broke into a sappy version of “Tell Laura I Love Her,” a song that was on virtually every karaoke machine in the country. I smiled, and a large man came over to greet us.

“Laura, I was told all about you.” Now even people I had never met knew my name. It shouldn’t have surprised me, being one of the few foreigners in such a small town. My parents started again with their

questions, but this time they got answers in English. This gentleman represented a Philippine general who owned the place and was developing a resort. He invited us to dinner, and I struggled for an answer. I looked to my father and answered “I...think we’re supposed to have dinner with Bill and Eden.” My father wholeheartedly agreed. “Yes, we are having dinner with Bill and Eden.” So the man waved to us and jumped in the boat with his workers, who were still singing their song.

My father said, “You’re a real local celebrity here. Kind of like a local TV weather reporter.”

We ate some lunch we had picked up at a small restaurant near the boat landing in San Vicente, and we threw the scraps, including a bag of stale peanuts, to a hungry, pregnant dog that ate every scrap and licked the bag.

We went for a walk and my dad spotted what looked like a blackberry bush and wondered if we could eat the berries. I asked Jerry’s teenage son, who was acting as our guide, who nodded and popped one in his mouth. That was good enough for me, so I had one too. It sure tasted like a blackberry, but there was a lot more seed and less fruit than the ones that grew in the backyard of my childhood home.

But they weren’t blackberries. Five hours later, back in town, my father was sicker than I had been when I went to the hospital. He didn’t even want to drink the beer that had been sitting on ice for him all day, and my mother and I wondered if he’d be able to go to Santa Clara with us the following day. My father doesn’t get sick very often, but when he does, it’s serious. Ten of those little “blackberries” had him knocked out.

On my parent’s last day in Santa Ana, we had no plans. My father was better so I sent Ed, the social worker, a text message so he could meet them. We were getting ready to take a walk when Eden said that there was someone to see me. At the gate was a diminutive, sophisticated man with a walking stick in one hand and a small girl holding the other. Gregory was wearing a straw hat, a pair of black pants and a new, tent-size Hawai’i T-shirt. Tibtib was also wearing the enormous shirt we gave her. Sisi’s baby was due any day now, and I had told Gregory that if there was a problem, to just go to the market and they’d know where I live.

“What’s up?” I called out.

“I came to get the battery for the light in case my wife has the baby at night.” I led him inside the gate and he squatted in the dirt. My father invited him to sit in a chair at the table with us while I went to fetch the battery and solar panels. My parents got four iced teas from the refrigerator and offered one to Gregory.

“It’s tasty,” I explained, and his daughter took a sip and made a face.

“But ma’am says it’s tasty,” Gregory told her. “You don’t like it?” She shook her head, and I explained it was like tea, and Gregory put it his backpack. “I’ll give it to the other kids and my wife,” he explained. I gave Gregory 50 pesos to buy a new light bulb, and within a few minutes, he was gone.

Ed arrived on his motorcycle looking like a Gap advertisement in a polo shirt and reflective wrap-around sunglasses. I introduced him to my mother, and each immediately quizzed the other about being a social worker in their respective countries. In Ed’s case, being in a very small town meant that he was also the Santa Ana minister of tourism and, in case of an emergency, disaster coordinator. I knew Ed was working with one of the other local groups of Agta on their ancestral titles to their land, so I mentioned what Gregory had told me about being forced to leave their land.

“Yeah, I could talk with him about that,” he said.

Ed took us on a tour of a cave that looked like the one where Luke Skywalker found himself on the ice planet Hoth, except this place was warm and humid. We crawled through a narrow opening into a second room, and from there we had to crawl on our bellies until we were in a claustrophobic chamber with a small lake. It seemed like the place where Dante started his journey into hell, only lacking a gondola. There was a river falling off to one side, so I handed my cell phone to one of the guides and went to climb along the steep edges of the lake to peer around the corner.

I lost my footing and slid down the muddy slope until I was waist deep in the murky water. I could feel my flip-flops getting sucked into the mud, and as I pulled my feet up, I was afraid that the soles would break off. I managed to get one shoe free, threw it onto the bank, and finally dislodged the second as I overheard our guides whisper “water snake.” I scrambled back on shore as fast as I could. My feet were caked in mud and my jeans were soaking wet, but at least the water had been cool and refreshing.

On their last night in Santa Ana, my parents and I shared a lobster feast with Bill and Eden. My mom said that she felt like a little girl again having grown up eating New England lobsters. Afterward we sat in Bill and Eden’s open kitchen and drank the local San Miguel beer while Eden and Bill drank coffee, and he told us about his days on a farm in Tennessee and then as an airplane mechanic in Saudi Arabia.

Eden mentioned Bill’s first wife in passing, and Bill warned, “Don’t say that name.” Eden said, “Oh, Bill. You loved her once.”

Bill replied, “Yeah. And so did every other man in town.”

We moved to their front yard and sat in the dark in the open, thatched-roof cabana while my dad and Bill exchanged stories of their time in the

military during the Vietnam War. My dad was in the army at a training post in Missouri typing documents that officers had falsified concerning the troops' rifle qualification and general readiness. The reports were sent directly to the Pentagon.

"Who were we fooling? The Viet Cong didn't read those reports."

In the dark we could see Bill's face in silhouette. "This other fella and I were walking along by this air base in Vietnam. This Vietnamese guy pops up in front of us with a gun and shoots my buddy. Kills him. It jus' as easy could've been me. I took my gun and shot him and killed him, too. I can see it now clear as day. So I killed a man. It was him or me. That's the only reason I'm here today."

"What a waste. So many dead and wounded. What did we get out of it?" I could hear my father's voice, but his face had disappeared in the night.

The next morning we took a van to Tuguegarao, checked into the actual fanciest hotel in town (one without roaches), and then stepped back out into an enormous jam of tricycles. We choked on the smog as we looked for one to take us to the Callao caves.

"I heard there are 14,000 tricycles in Tuguegarao," I said.

My father looked up and down the street. He joked, "I estimate that three percent of all greenhouse-gas emissions in the world come from Tuguegarao tricycles." My dad knew his math, but I wasn't so sure about this one. Surely the number was higher.

We hailed one, and four hit the brakes and pulled to our side of the street. We jumped into the nearest, and I negotiated a deal for him take us to the caves. As the driver edged his vehicle into the clotted traffic, I saw him cross himself and I hoped that the ride wouldn't be more of an adventure than I had anticipated.

A few miles out of town, our slow tricycle passed through an archway consisting of two plaster elephants on their hind legs, one elephant on each side of the road, their intertwined trunks holding a sign saying *Welcome – Peñablanca Barangay*.

Our driver parked the tricycle and we climbed 587 steps to the site. Callao was a cathedral compared to the claustrophobic caves in Santa Ana. Apparently I wasn't the only one who made the connection, because in the largest chamber there were pews arranged in front of an altar with a small Virgin Mary tucked into the limestone. No cross or Jesus in this church, just Mary. As we exited the caves, a sign explained that the ancestors of the modern Agta had inhabited the caves some 4,000 years ago and traded for decorated pots, clay earrings, and beads with Austronesian-speaking people living in the Cagayan valley.

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

When we arrived at the tiny airport, it was swarming with armed police, Cagayan special forces, and Philippine soldiers in tan fatigue uniforms with automatic weapons. The plane to Manila was delayed. After a long wait, the airport-security woman allowed me to enter the terminal to see my parents off, provided I handed her the enormous machete I had picked up as a gift for Dalang. My parents and a few others crossed the scorching tarmac to board the small passenger plane.

The soldiers and police flooded through the terminal onto the tarmac and into formation. A vehicle whisked up and Cardinal Rosales emerged. He was a frail, pale-skinned older gentleman wearing a beige *barong*, the lacy formal men's clothing that is mandatory for public servants. The army band played a flourish and the soldiers performed their choreographed maneuvers. Then, as the cardinal boarded the plane with only his closest advisor, the entire military force melted away, leaving the lonely aircraft with its propellers spinning, still preparing for takeoff. The security guard smiled sweetly as she returned my machete.

13 THE LONGEST FISH GRILL IN THE HISTORY OF THE WORLD

I realized it would take me all afternoon to type the sentences Gregory had translated when I was there with my parents. But just as I was growing weary of staring at the computer screen, Eric came to tell me that I had a visitor. Bill said, “Them guys from the city hall want to talk to you. I guess you’re the mayor’s new stooge.”

Within a minute I was speeding away on the back of a motorcycle with a man I didn’t know, the warm rain sweeping into my face and rolling off my University of Hawai‘i Rainbows baseball cap, a very thin helmet in the event of an accident.

Ed and a few hangers-on clad in shorts and flip-flops sat around a small table in the entranceway to city hall. After it was established who I was, what languages I spoke, and how long I would be in Santa Ana, Ed said, “We need you to help us with the *Guinness Book of World Records*.”

The town’s leaders had decided to set a world record for the longest continuous chain of people grilling fish in the history of the world. They needed three outside witnesses to verify the event. Ed read the Guinness Book requirements for witnesses.

“Judges, clergy, the mayor (well the mayor can’t do it because he is part of the bid), city officials (they can’t do it either, same reason), respected business people, et cetera. I guess you fall under et cetera. You’ll have to use your GPS to measure the length.” I readily agreed to be a witness.

When I finished incorporating the new data into my dictionary and grammar—my dissertation was growing day by day—I went to the market to ask the shopkeepers to help me write new questions. A major part of documenting an endangered language without a written form is to record not just the vocabulary, but also the grammar and the common expressions

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

and all the ways that the people use sound to express meaning. The shopkeepers enjoyed this game immensely, as it took their minds off the slow pace of business on a weekday afternoon. I wanted sentences that were more relevant to the lives of Agta. They came up with, “We are looking for a monitor lizard to eat.”

I was assured that they were very tasty.

The next day I was sneezing and felt lousy, but it had been decided that I would accompany Bill and Eden’s daughters to the town fiesta.

The girls took a long time to get the right outfits and matching hats. We arrived at the market just as the parade was starting, with schoolteachers in matching Hawaiian shirts, a group of children dressed like lobsters, and lots of farmers and fisherman. This was the *viray* festival. *Viray* is the name of a kind of flat wooden boat that the first Ilokanos used to come to Santa Ana from the Ilocos region in the west. Almost hidden among the children dressed as farmers and fisherman was a small group of Agta. They weren’t dancing or marching, just walking in the parade, dressed in what approximated their traditional clothing with the addition of modern underwear for modesty. When the parade ended, we caught a tricycle back to the city hall area to see the dance competition.

Boatmen and women swayed and farmers pounded rice, and then a visiting group of dancers wearing the traditional clothing of the Ifugao people we had seen in Banaue came into the arena. The men were bare-chested and wore headdresses and traditional pants, except for one group, which wore white sashes over their chests. Soon the two groups began to fight, their shields clashing and their spears threatening, until Spanish monks carrying silver crosses arrived to pacify the heathen tribes with Christianity. The newly Christianized Filipinos, subjects of the Spanish King Philip—whom the Philippine Islands are named after—danced around peacefully in praise of the Virgin Mary.

When more tiny farmers and fishermen appeared, I squirmed through the thick crowd that had formed, all edging to see their little costumed cousins, and made my way to the far end of a dirt lot where the performers waited. The Agta sat off to one side in a shed. I greeted a middle-aged man with a real spear, a lot sharper than the ones that the visiting dancers had wielded.

“Will you dance, *manong*?” I asked, addressing the Agta man as older brother.

“Yes.”

“Where are you from?”

“From Marede.” That was the first group of Agta I had met, the ones

that spoke the language that was already documented. Americans are not as good at waiting as the Agta, and I couldn't help but ask, "When will you dance?"

He looked at me funny, "Today."

Back at my seat in the stands Bill and Eden's daughters excitedly pointed out their friends. "Look at Jenny dance!" "Oh my god, look at Pedro. His sword is tied on wrong."

Ed's voice boomed from the loudspeaker. "Next, we will have special guest performers. Before the Ilokanos ever came here in their *viray* boats, there were Agta. Would you please come forward?"

The Agta were still sitting in the waiting shed in the shade. I guess nobody had told them they were next. A dozen Agta men and women, mostly older, walked slowly into a performance area designed for much larger groups. They gathered into a small circle. Two men and one woman kneeled in the dirt with metal gongs that they began to beat with their hands to make a rhythm.

This was a dance made for an intimate gathering, perhaps millennia old, and the Agta were dwarfed by their surroundings. An older couple danced in circles around each other, waving their arms. They weren't particularly skilled, just an ordinary couple dancing as they would at a traditional gathering. Others stood or sat in the circle watching, holding bows and spears as the reporters from Manila, the representatives from city hall, and I crowded in close to get pictures. One young man twirled alone, his powerful legs and arms in motion while his hips twisted.

The dance was over quickly and the reporters returned to their seats. A singer from Manila that nobody had heard of sang a duet with a local gentleman, and I went home. Tomorrow was going to be the day of the longest fish grill in the history of the world, and I would be an official Santa Ana witness for the *Guinness Book of World Records*.

It was a miracle. Makeshift wooden horses supported a tin trough that stretched as far I could see in both directions. The entire trough was filled with charcoal that, despite a short burst of rain, was fairly dry. Sometime during the early morning hours, large coolers of fish had appeared at intervals of one hundred yards along the grill. One-liter plastic Coke bottles filled with fuel were arranged beside them.

A lady asked me why I wasn't wearing white if I was going to grill fish. Everyone was supposed to wear white, she said, so I had no choice but to go home and grab a white T-shirt.

Once properly dressed, I saw Ed hanging out of the side of a tricycle gesturing for me to get on. I grabbed the seat behind the driver, and we headed off to the end of the fish grill.

"Do you have your GPS?" Ed asked. "Can you measure the length of

the grill now, or do you need to wait for the people?”

“I’ll measure it now. At this end, then at the other end, but for it to be accurate, I’ll need to take a reading for at least five minutes.”

Ed indicated to the tricycle driver that he should cut the motor, and I set the device down at the end of the grill and watched as the measurement got more and more accurate. At around 250 readings, the thing hovered at eight meters of accuracy, and I marked the spot. Time to go to the other end.

A reporter flagged us down with his notebook and swung onto the tricycle with real panache; we could tell he was from Manila. We passed black-robed nuns from the hospital, but everyone else was in white T-shirts and shorts. This fish grill seemed never-ending. We drove out past all the resorts and almost all the way to the port, where the sign read “Thank you for visiting Santa Ana.” The grill stopped on a small bridge, and I took a second reading on the GPS, measured the distance between the two points, and showed Ed.

“4.0 kilometers?”

“Yes, that’s exactly right,” Ed told me. “The longest fish grill in the world.”

I wondered what poor 3.5 kilometer fish grill we were outdoing.

We raced back to the far end of the grill, where the mayor was ready to pour the gas and strike the first match. A man with an old-fashioned measuring wheel set out to walk the four kilometers. He was the second witness for the Guinness Book. The mayor poured the gas and the grill burst into flames as the reporters from Manila snapped photos. The flame made it about 15 feet before someone had to pour on more gas.

We got on the tricycle for the return to the far end. As we started out, we could see people lighting the grill.

“There’s no more gas!” they shouted to Ed as the tricycle sped by. People knew he was from the city hall.

“It’s all gone. Do your best,” Ed shouted back, and we knew they would because everyone, children and adults, nuns and fisherman, farmers and shopkeepers had already pulled up dry grass and sticks and tucked them among the charcoal.

We got to the end, where people had begun to put the fish onto the grill.

“No, no, put them lengthwise, so that the head touches the tail of the next fish, so we have a continuous grill,” Ed cried. The fish were piled in front of each griller, and Ed ran around to spread the wealth. The four tons of fish would only go so far. We got back in the tricycle and headed again for the other end, but Ed stopped the tricycle every few feet.

“Lengthwise! Put the fish lengthwise!” he commanded. “When I come back to take the video, make sure the fish are evenly distributed!” The people nodded and rearranged their fish. But there were four kilometers of

grillers, and Ed soon gave up. He still had to take the documentary video for the Guinness Book.

We sped back to the start. The fish were all on the grill, and some were starting to look crispy. A griller took one off for a bite.

“No, no, don’t eat that!” Ed exploded. “We haven’t taken the video yet!”

The man dutifully put the fish back, just head and tail and spine bones, and started in on the meat of the second fish. As we waited for the mayor, streams of people began heading out of town carrying stacks of grilled fish.

“Where are you going? We haven’t taken the video yet!” They just shrugged and kept walking.

Ed searched frantically for the driver of the van with loudspeakers—he could tell them not to go home yet. The mayor finally showed up and jumped into a police vehicle. Sirens screaming, the black-and-white SUV led the way for our little tricycle, Ed perched on top with the video camera.

The first 20 feet were good. Lots of fish, lots of people. Then nothing. Everyone had gone home and taken the fish with them. A few children and old ladies were dumping buckets of water on the grill while housewives gathered the unused charcoal for their kitchens. But at the three-kilometer mark, we encountered eager grillers waving to the camera over fish arranged more or less evenly. Then another empty section, then more eager fish grillers.

With some careful editing, this could make a good video. The reporter from Manila decided that no record had been set. I told Ed, but he wasn’t disappointed.

“This was just a dry run. Next year, the people from the Guinness Book will actually come here. And now we know what we’re doing.”

“Next time,” I suggested, “You need walkie-talkies to coordinate.” The Manila reporter agreed.

14 THE PEOPLE FROM THE OPPOSITE SIDE

I was lounging on the couch watching something about deep-sea fishing on the Discovery Channel in Bill and Eden's living room when another new maid came in and said I had a visitor. I went outside and saw Gregory and his daughter Tibtib squatting in the shade of a small tree, meager shelter from the midday heat. I led them to the thatched-roof cabana, where I leaned my elbows on the table and waited.

"My wife had the baby. A boy."

"Was the birth difficult?"

"No, it was easy, it took about five hours. She went into labor in the morning and had the baby by noon yesterday."

"How are Sisi and the baby doing?"

"Doing well, the baby is fat. I came to ask for money to pay the midwife."

"How much is it?"

"300."

I gave him 500 pesos. He said he would buy clothes for the new baby and a fish for his wife. He got ready to leave, but I offered to show him around.

"Do you live there?" he pointed to the big house.

"No, I live in back. But it's not just me. There are lots of other people here. Different people every night."

"Do you own this place?"

"No, I just rent."

"How much is it?" he asked.

I usually didn't tell people when they asked, but I felt I ought to be honest with Gregory. "Two hundred pesos per day." About four dollars.

"Wow, that's a lot."

"But they feed me, too." Why was I being defensive?

I showed him my room, where he pointed to my fan.

“Is this one of those things that makes wind?”

He was impressed, even though there was only a bed, a desk, and nothing on the walls except a tattered printout of the various Agta pronouns that I could look at as I worked on my laptop. My books fit into the desk, and my clothes and equipment lived in a couple of backpacks and duffel bags in one corner. The cement floors were painted red and the cement walls white. Along one side of the room was a set of large windows, open but covered with thin curtains that were washed by the maid once a month.

Gregory and his daughter sat on the floor and I offered them cookies from a large jar I had bought a month earlier. I had been bringing a few cookies to the Agta on every visit. They went straight for a small bag of candy I had stashed in there.

“Have you heard anything about the land yet?” I asked. “Do you know the price?” The last time I went to Santa Clara the Agta had shown me a beautiful piece of land that they wanted me to buy for them. It had a fast-flowing stream, gently rolling hills, and soft grass.

“No, we still haven’t talked with the barangay captain.”

“Because maybe I can’t afford it,” I said. “It could be 10 thousand pesos or a million.” Gregory gave a little gasp at that astronomical sum.

“If you can’t afford it, don’t buy it,” he told me. “We can live somewhere else, further upstream. But if you can afford it, it would be convenient for both you and for us. If you buy it, it could be your remembrance to us.” Gregory used the English word “remembrance” that had seeped its way first into Tagalog, then into Ilokano, and finally into Agta.

They got up to leave, but I suggested that they stay for lunch, and I would show them around the rest of the place. I took them to Bill and Eden’s house. Bill was sitting in a recliner watching his big-screen TV. He asked in English, “His wife have that baby yet? Was it a boy?”

“Yup, a boy,” I answered.

“Now he don’t have to try for any more kids. He got his boy.”

I asked one of Bill’s girls to translate his words, but she translated into Tagalog instead of Ilokano and Gregory misunderstood.

“No, no,” Gregory said. “This is my daughter. She’s a girl.” He pointed at Tibtib.

“No, the new baby,” I tried to explain, and Gregory fell silent, shy that he was being talked about in a language he didn’t understand. He sat down on the floor in the corner of the carpeted living room. His daughter sat beside him and leaned on his shoulder, her arm resting in his lap, while they watched the TV. It was a cop show in English, and they were mesmerized. Tibtib would be bragging for weeks that she and her dad went to town and

got to watch the whatchamacallit. I would have to provide the English word “TV.”

Lunch was served, and Gregory took a single plate for his daughter and himself. He took a generous helping of rice and a bit of meat and stood at the table until Bill came around and in his loud Southern drawl announced, “Whaddaya doing standing, Gregory, take a chair,” and pushed a chair in Gregory’s direction. For a moment, it didn’t matter that these two men, a six-foot mechanic from Tennessee and a five-foot hunter-gatherer from the rural Philippines, didn’t share a common language.

Gregory sat at the table with us, quickly finished his meal, and walked just outside the open-air kitchen, pulling out his bag for chewing betel. He looked at the small green nut that resembled an acorn, but did not open it to get at the bitter kernel inside. He was probably embarrassed to dirty the yard with the red betel juices. I threw my plate in the sink and when I approached, he announced that he had better get back to his wife to bring her a fish.

A few days later, I walked through the jungle with a heavy load of food and equipment on my back and greeted the people in the first houses of the Agta camp. The twelve-year-old girl I had taught to read from left to right rushed up to greet me: “Sisi had her baby!” As Gregory’s hut came into view, his family greeted me just as enthusiastically. I dropped my backpack on my bamboo floor, and Gregory and others came by to remove their own things from my hut.

Sisi and the new baby were in their hut, where the baby, in a brand-new white shirt, lay in a pile of clean clothes. He was tiny. His face and body were red under the small tuft of black hair on his head, and he cried feebly until Sisi picked him up to breastfeed. Gregory took out a coconut shell, scraped the outside of it until he had a pinch of brown powder, and placed it on the baby’s belly button. He said it was healing nicely. The infant cried a bit, but Sisi held the powder in place and the baby soon fell asleep.

Gregory started a fire to boil water, and we sat and drank coffee while he translated the new sentences that I’d developed with the help of the Ilokano shopkeepers in Santa Ana.

“How does the man with no arms wash himself?” was one of the sentences my teenage shopkeepers had been especially pleased with.

Later that afternoon, I sat with a group of Agta adults—whoever was interested in what I was doing—drank more coffee, and went over the entries in the dictionary that I was having trouble with. The weather was hot and sticky, and the clouds were low and threatening.

“*Dupaneng*. Does that mean ‘north wind,’ or ‘opposite side of

something?”

“Opposite side. Specifically, a place in an adjacent river valley.” This is where the name of the language came from. *Dupaningan Agta*, the people from the opposite side.

In the late afternoon a fierce wind blew in from the south, shaking tree branches and whipping the flimsy plastic tarp Gregory had strung around his house as a wall. I felt a drop of rain on my shoulder and inched in toward the center of his tiny hut. With three adults and four children on a seven-foot-square bamboo floor, there was not a lot I could do to keep dry.

I quickly finished my dinner and scrambled to my own hut ten feet away as the rain hammered my head and shoulders. I was safe under my American tarp, but my shirt was soaking wet and I was freezing. Since it was summer, I had not brought a sweatshirt or any warm clothes. I put a short-sleeved shirt over the long-sleeved one I was wearing to protect me from the nighttime mosquitoes and shivered. I gathered my computer, notebooks, Ilokano dictionary, and cameras, stuffed them all into the waterproof cover over my backpack, and placed the bundle in the middle of my hut, where rain was unlikely to blow in from either side.

Then Tibtib, hunched down under the driving rain, sprinted from her family’s hut and hopped into mine. She was carrying what appeared to have once been a dress and wrapped it around herself like a blanket. I edged close to the little girl for warmth and pulled my sleeping bag out of my backpack to drape it over us. I laid my head down on my gear, listened to the rat-a-tat-tat of the rain on the tarp, and settled into our little nest.

In the full light of the morning, I crawled out from under the mosquito net that had let in the battalions of biting insects that were trapped with me and Tibtib in our tiny sleeping space. The new baby had only woken me once during the night; he didn’t cry much. I guess he made up for Sisi’s next youngest, Babyanne, eighteen months old, who cried at the drop of a banana leaf. That kid would have to grow up in a hurry now, I thought, secretly pleased.

Later, as Doreen and I walked to the store through the jungle, I felt a sharp, hot pain in the side of my neck and brushed off a big, stinging red ant.

“I got bit by a *kannet*!” I yelled.

She replied calmly, “You don’t mean *kannet*. That’s the Agta word for *little* red ant,” and gave me the word for “large red ant.” My skin throbbed all the way to the camp, but being the perennial academic, I was somewhat consoled by this interesting new development in ant terminology. I dropped my backpack full of food, tobacco, and a pint of gin, which the shopkeeper had told me the Agta use in a medicine for women after they give birth, and retreated to the cool shade of my hut.

Gregory appeared from the forest with branches, which he then cut into

small pieces. Half the gin was poured into another bottle, and Doreen dropped little twigs into the narrow opening of the pint bottle as she tasted a little gin from the second and pushed twigs into it as well. The bottles were placed next to the fire until the concoction was boiling. I looked at the distant mountains for a long time—the pain from the bite was subsiding—and when I returned my gaze to the fire, the bottles were gone.

I got up and made my way across the smooth rocks of the riverbed to the far side of the silent valley. I walked upstream, where I basked in the sun and listened to distant birds, until I heard the squeal of little girls and stood up to see that Tibtib and Sasat were hiding and watching me. I ignored them and pretended I had the valley to myself. I floated downstream and swam back against the current until I heard voices, so I waded ashore and put on a shirt.

The women were washing clothes in the river. They had a radio playing traditional Ilokano folk songs. I sat and watched as the children jumped off the bank into a deep swimming hole, splashed around in the river, and chased a luckless crab. It was beautiful and serene, and I fought the feeling that I didn't belong and tried to enjoy it.

Gregory stacked pieces of bamboo sticks in layers like Lincoln logs, and placed four or five tiny snail-like shells in the center, and then lit the whole thing on fire. He was making lime, one of the ingredients in the betel-nut chew. As he waited for the shells to turn to ash, Gregory told me that he owed a debt to the Ilokano man Stephen. Since Sisi had been pregnant, he explained, he had not been able to collect as many birds' nests as he had expected. Could I lend him the money to pay Stephen back?

"How much is it?" I asked. Gregory called Stephen over from another part of the camp, and the man pulled a list out of his pocket:

Rudy 400 - Bunay 970 - Kanlab 320

I studied the list and stifled a sigh. Bion Griffin, the anthropologist I met in Manila who lived with the Agta and ate the deer and pigs that they caught, theorized that the addiction to tobacco—which is mixed with lime in the betel-nut chew—and an inability to grow it themselves in the Sierra Madre Mountains was a big reason why the Agta were dependent on trade with the Ilokano.

Sisi called over from her hut, "Maybe she doesn't understand!"

Gregory watched me as I looked the paper over, handed it back to Stephen, and agreed to pay the debt.

"She understands!" Gregory called back. To me, he said, "Everybody

knows me as Bunay, nobody calls me Gregory.”

“Yeah, it’s hard for me to keep track of all your names.”

Gregory pointed to Rudy and said, “Yes, he has three names: Rudy, Rudak and Pilay.”

“I gave Stephen a thousand pesos and he said he didn’t have change, so I told him to apply it to Rudy’s debt.

Gregory asked when we would take our trip down the coast, so I took out my cell phone and texted Ed, who would accompany us, and we arranged a date.

Rudy asked, “Can I come on your trip down the coast?”

Gregory explained that Rudy was looking for a new wife. His wife had not been able to get pregnant, so he would like to come with us to meet some eligible women. After a discussion earlier that morning in which Rudy revealed he was having pain when he urinated, I wondered who was really to blame for the couple having no children.

We arranged for Gregory to come to Santa Ana the night before the trip, and then Gregory asked, “Could we go with you sometime to Manila? I’ve never been and I’ve always wanted to go. I’ve heard there are a lot of big trucks.” Gregory used the English word *ta-ruck*. I tried to imagine myself taking Gregory around Manila and answered lamely, “It’s expensive.”

“That’s okay, then, forget it.” He was disappointed.

In the fading light, Gregory made an announcement. “I will leave tomorrow to get my sister and brother-in-law. Someone needs to be here to fetch water for my wife while she is recovering from the birth.”

After setting up the mosquito net for the two young girls who would share my hut that night, I grabbed a flashlight and sat on a log where I could see the stars, magnificent points of white light piercing the black sky, as I reviewed my notes from the day. Except for the sound of insects, the forest was quiet and peaceful. I listened to Gregory’s melodic voice as he sang to his children. A half moon, ghost-like and beautiful, hung between the trees.

The next morning, Tibtib and her friends staged a mock wedding ceremony. They stuffed banana leaves into the shirts of the dancing “bride and groom.” I wondered if it was a custom for the Agta to give cash as a gift at weddings, as in many Pacific cultures.

“Is that money?” I asked in Agta.

“No, it’s leaves,” the oldest girl, my twelve-year-old student, informed me.

Soon I put on my backpack and got ready to leave. Gregory carried a traditional woven basket with modern backpack straps. I told him that I could go alone.

“No, I will go with you. There were three Ilokano men here last night.

They could be bad.”

“Did they sleep here?”

“No, I just saw them out by the fence,” He pointed about twenty yards from where our two huts stood, to the broken barbed-wire fence that a farmer had built long ago.

“Ilokano men come in the middle of the night, drunk. I don’t like it.”

“Why do they come?”

“I don’t know. It’s always been like that.”

“Are they people you know?”

“People I know, people I don’t know. I was afraid that they might try to kill you.”

I figured that he was being overly dramatic. My dad had tried to instill in Gregory a sense of duty to protect me, and he had understood. I would help Gregory with money and maybe use my pull as a foreigner to get him some assistance from the government, and he in turn was responsible for my safety.

At the road I paid him his salary, and he set off back toward the Agta camp while I waited for a tricycle to take me to Santa Ana. On the ride back, I struck up a conversation with an old lady. She asked what I was doing, and I explained that I was studying language and writing a dictionary. When I told her that I worked with Agta, her eyes lit up, and she asked me if they collected honey. I said that I had been with them to collect honey, and that it was the best honey I had ever tasted.

“They also eat eels, and go fishing, and collected birds’ nests and rattan.”

She looked at me intently, “Is it true that they have tails?”

“No.” I replied flatly. It wasn’t the first time I had been asked that.

“Oh, they don’t have tails anymore? When my grandmother was young, Agta people had tails.”

15 NO BETEL NUT IN HEAVEN

The Agta started to shout and point. Gregory scrambled down the hardened dirt incline to the water and plunged his hand in to pull out a gray, oozing organism larger than his fist. Its tentacles crawled up his arm, but he scraped them off and deposited the beast on the concrete. Ed picked it up gently, placed it in his mouth, and bit down. The ball of gray slime fell limp between his teeth.

“I spent three years catching octopus when I was young,” Ed explained in English, smiling.

Rudy shouted in Ilokano, “There’s another one! There’s another one!”

Gregory jumped into the sea, feet first this time, then looked back at me standing on the shore and said in Agta, almost apologizing, “He went into a hole under the rock.”

Our boat arrived. It had two engines, a small boathouse for the driver, and plenty of room for all of us under a tarp that would provide cover from the baking rays of the sun. Gregory, Rudy, Ed, me, the head of the Santa Ana education department, and many of their companions and relatives loaded onto the boat and we puttered out into the dawn.

Gregory hung his feet off the side, where they dangled low enough that he got spray from the ocean, and beamed.

“Sister! Your camera!” he commanded over the noise of the engine and the ocean, using his usual respectful term of address for me. I produced the video camera from my bag and Gregory shot the passing scenery while I mused that in another life he would have been an excellent movie director. A few minutes later, he edged his way toward the front of the boat where I was sitting.

“Sister, Rudy’s wife doesn’t want to go to Nangaramuan. She wants to come with us. She’s afraid Rudy will look for another wife.” This seemed like a reasonable fear, since I had heard Rudy say that that was his plan. I

told Ed the story, and we agreed she would come with us.

Gregory edged forward to talk to me again. “*Madiget*,” he said in Agta, “oceany.” The sea was rough. He was getting seasick. It was actually quite a nice day, and I was pleased that the waves were not nearly as big as a house, like Bill claimed while teasing me about the trip. “When you’re at the bottom of a wave and look up, all you can see is water,” he’d said. “My nephews threw up all the way home, and they’re seamen. I laughed so hard I didn’t have a chance to get sick.”

After breakfast at our first stop, Ed and I waded to shore. The Agta people there had a slightly different dialect that I wanted to document, and I also wanted to see Fidel, who had been my teenage guide on one of my first trips to the Agta camp. I had been alarmed by a story I had heard in the Santa Ana Centro that one of his big toes had been cut off in a boating accident.

We asked two sleepy men sitting under a tree untangling a fishing net where to go. They both pointed at a path along the coast. We passed a young boy milling rice by pounding it with an enormous mortar and pestle, then sifting out the rice grains in a flat round rattan mortar that allowed the shells to be carried away with the wind. He poured more rice in the basket, grabbed a pestle that was taller than himself, and started pounding. Ed rushed over, took the pestle from the astonished boy’s hands, reached high in the air, and pounded with all his might. He did it again and again.

“When I was a kid, we always milled rice by hand,” he explained in English. “That’s how you do it,” he told the boy in Ilokano, and the small boy watched him with wonder as we walked along the path curling away from the shore and into the jungle.

I found Fidel playing basketball—the Philippine people are mad for the game—and I was surprised to find him taller and much more muscular than when I had last seen him. He told me that he walked with his friends to high school about an hour each way on an invisible path that cut through the mountains. He pointed out a small scar on his pinky toe and I was relieved that the rumors in town had been exaggerated. I tried to convince him to come back to Santa Ana, but another young man had filled his job at the shoe store in the Centro and he wasn’t returning without a source of support.

Later that night, when we were sitting by a fire after an interview with a local Agta man, Gregory asked, “What’s Ed’s job?” I asked him to repeat the question because he used a new word, and this time he said, “Is Ed police?”

“No. He’s a social worker. He helps the Agta who live in Marede. He wants to help you, but you have to ask.”

“That’s our problem. We are too shy. We don’t ask for help.” This was a strong statement. In the Agta world, it was good to be shy. Someone who

wasn't *masaniki*, "shy," was considered shameless.

Ed told me that Santa Ana was the only municipality in Cagayan that didn't have land set aside for Agta. I asked him to repeat that in Ilokano. He told Gregory, "But the process takes a long time. One step. Then the next. There is a lot of paperwork." The small Negrito man nodded.

Back on the boat, Rudy stretched out to put his hand in the water and I saw a wide, ugly scar on his stomach. Ed teased him, "How did you get that scar and the nickname 'Cripple?'"

"Before I was married I was shot in the stomach. It was an Ilokano man, he shot me. My friend owed him a lot of money. I was in the hospital and I couldn't walk for a long time. Maybe one year. Maybe more. They started calling me Cripple. I was, but now I am good." Ed turned instantly from the joking buddy into the town social worker, asking a series of rapid-fire questions about who the man was, his relationship with Rudy, and the nature of the dispute. I was at the back end of the boat, and with the noises of the engine and the ocean I couldn't understand what Rudy said except for the words "land" and "money" and "gun." Ed asked if the police arrested the man who shot him and didn't seem surprised when Rudy said they hadn't.

Our next stop, Bolos, had a nice sheltered harbor, but our boat driver was afraid to pull in until one of the Agta jumped out, swam to the narrow opening leading to the harbor and called out that the water was above his head.

We docked next to a blue boat with the name *Agta* painted on its side and headed toward a settlement. Dogs barked wildly as we approached a thatched hut. Inside were a small, slender Agta man, a woman, and two children. The man said that the blue boat was owned by all the Agta in the community, and he was its driver.

We arranged to sleep in a nearby hut; Ed would sleep on our boat and return to Santa Ana in the morning. I left Ed and walked to a row of Agta huts. By the time everyone had finished dinner, Rudy and Gregory were loud and slurring their words: "Sorry, sister, sometimes we just like to enjoy ourselves."

"Sometimes I like to drink too," I confessed, and Gregory mused, "My white friends are just like my Agta friends." I was glad to be counted among his friends, but I felt sorry for the Agta boatman, who was quietly sitting in his open-air house reading the Bible by light of his makeshift lantern. I told Gregory, "It doesn't bother me, but these kids are trying to sleep." Gregory moved his gang a few feet away, but it was useless; they were just as loud.

In the morning, Gregory said, "I'm sorry the Agta aren't very friendly

here.” He probably thought I made a bad decision to stay in Bolos. Then my trip cinematographer suggested, “Let’s go take a look around and maybe I could shoot some video.”

“And maybe I can do some interviews.” I packed my gear into a small bag, but before we left I had a problem. The straps were coming off my flip-flops. My survival bag had a sewing kit and glue, but it was in Santa Ana.

Gregory looked at my slippers. “Whew, it’s too bad we don’t have a needle and thread.” He hadn’t brought his machete on the trip, but he had picked up an arrow on our prior stop, and he used it to puncture my flip-flops. He searched the ground, littered with bits of trash, and found a small string, and in a couple of minutes, my shoes were fixed. “Let’s go.”

We found relatives of Gregory’s, an old man and a child who had stayed behind for the day while others went in search of food. The man was too shy to tell stories or to do an interview, saying only, “Our Agta language is no good. We use too much Ilokano now.”

Gregory said he would catch some fish for us. He borrowed bright orange goggles and a two-foot stainless-steel rod, and tied an oversized rubber band to the rod to make a slingshot.



FIGURE 6 AN AGTA MAN WITH HOMEMADE FISHING GOGGLES

“I’ll take a video,” I suggested. He liked that idea. He stripped down to

his briefs and jumped in the river, its rushing water coming up to his waist. He stuck his face in, slapped the water with his hands, readied the sling shot, and snap! He held a small fish up for me to capture on video, strung it onto a thin vine, and dove underwater again. I lost track of him, but he surfaced ten feet away and slapped the water again. Snap! Another fish, the colors of the rainbow, was on the vine. He worked his way down the stream, adding fish to his line. I had to keep a steady pace along the bank just to keep up. In ten minutes, he had caught as many fish.

We went to a small *sari-sari* store in a barrio across the river. Gregory asked for a few packs of cigarettes, coffee, and other supplies. I added a few pastries and asked for alcohol because the cut on my foot from the first day of our trip was starting to become infected after crossing so many rivers and walking in the dirt every day in flip-flops.

“What?” She said, not understanding the word I used.

“To clean cuts,” I explained. “We don’t have anything like that,” she said, but I could see the bottle through the window. I really hated these stores, where you had to ask for everything through a window. They were a nightmare for someone who didn’t speak the language well. I gave up on the alcohol and handed the woman 500 pesos. Our order didn’t fit through the window, so she came outside.

“The change?” I asked.

“Oh, yes, oh, yes, right here,” she said, handing it to me. Later, looking at our things, Gregory said, “That woman cheated you. She didn’t give us our onions.” An Agta and a white American together must have seemed like a dream come true. One customer who she thinks can’t count and the other too rich to know the difference.

We watched the video of Gregory fishing while our meal was on the fire. Gregory and Rudy loved every minute. I showed them the video of the Agta group dancing and the rest of the town fiesta and as the light faded, other Agta gravitated toward us.

“Show them the Labin Agta dancing,” Gregory urged, and I did. Ten Agta sat in the dirt under the roof of our hut, twilight falling, and watched the Agta people dance on the screen of my laptop. When the dance was over, Gregory asked me to show the video of his family in Santa Clara, and a few people started to drift away. Then he had me run a slideshow of photographs of his family, and soon we were all alone to eat our dinner.

The colorful fish was quite tasty.

After dinner, I was to interview Gregory’s uncle. The three of us waited in the cloudy night outside the hut for the older man, who came and quietly sat down. I set my microphone in the dirt, extinguished the flashlight, and watched the reassuring red glow of the digital audio recorder as he spoke.

When we got back to Santa Clara, Gregory and I would sit and listen to the recording. Gregory may have had a hard time with the narrative, but he

was a skilled translator. He would repeat each line for me slowly for me to write down. In the process, he would also change the language a little bit, taking out the Ilokano loan words and replacing them with Agta and adding and subtracting until the tale flowed well.

The old man told the story of his life. He had moved around collecting birds' nests here, rattan there, and it was very hard. After his uncle left, Gregory asked me if there were any differences between their languages. I said that there was. Every time Gregory had an r-sound the old man had an h. Gregory was unimpressed, but it was important. A Californian and a Bostonian don't sound the same, and neither did Gregory and his uncle.

I awoke in the dark to the sound of long, low, mournful wailing, first the voice of a woman and then that of a man joined in. Rudy lit a cigarette.

"What's that?" I asked.

"A baby died."

Rudy and I went to the window to look. The wailing was coming from a hut we had passed earlier in the day. Relatives carrying torches gathered outside the hut to comfort the parents. The family's other children cried, and grandparents and other relatives held them in their arms. We stayed in our hut, not knowing the family, and understanding that nothing could be done. I returned to my hammock, listened in the dark to the mournful voices of those two bereaved parents, and eventually fell asleep. In the morning the parents were still wailing. They stopped for half an hour, and then something set them off again. We quietly ate our breakfast and got ready for church. It was Sunday. Our Agta boatman was one of the pastors. To get to church, we crossed by the mourning household, and when I looked in, the two parents were still wrapped in their blankets from the night before, one on either side of a tiny, lifeless infant. They were not crying at the moment, so I bowed my head and quickly passed.

Two men with a loudly whining chainsaw cut up a large piece of driftwood on the beach. Gregory wanted to learn how to use a chainsaw, so we stopped. They had him cut the giant log in half.

"Go easy on it, no, just little by little, good, now bring it down." Gregory was pleased with himself. The more experienced man now cut short boards from the log, and I wondered why the boards were so small until I realized that they were for a tiny coffin.

We waded across the river, following other Agta people until we reached a square wooden building with "Agta Center" written in English above the entrance. The three of us filed in and sat in the back. Our boatman/preacher paused in his sermon, turned to greet us, and asked if I understood Ilokano. When I said I did, he continued.

An Agta boy, quite well dressed, brought us each a Bible. Gregory and Rudy left theirs on the bench in front of them. I opened mine; it was an SIL translation with Agta on the odd pages and Ilokano on the even.

“What is heaven?” the preacher asked.

“It’s like a big city!” one of the Agta offered helpfully, but the preacher ignored him.

“It’s a place with no work, no drinking, and no chewing betel nut.” The preacher shook his finger in the direction of Gregory and Rudy, who were not pleased about not being able to chew betel in heaven. I was reminded of an American bluegrass song about hobo heaven.

There’s a lake of stew and whiskey too

You can paddle all around them in a big canoe

In the big rock candy mountains

At the end of the sermon, an Ilokano woman sang “Jesus is Alive” in Ilokano, and then the congregation sang it in Agta, and then in Tagalog, and again in English. Next they sang in Tagalog “How Are You?” They all walked over to us, being the newcomers to the church, shaking our hands.

“You put your right foot in, you put your left foot in, and you turn yourself about.”

I had learned this song on my first day of Tagalog class, three years before in Hawai‘i, and I remember wondering then why Tagalog *kumusta* for “how are you?” sounded almost exactly like Spanish *como está?* I hadn’t studied any Philippine history then and didn’t know that the Philippines had been ruled by Spain for centuries until the Spanish-American War. When I studied that war as a sixteen-year-old high-school exchange student in Spain, the Spanish were the good guys, and when I studied the war in U.S. History class in California it was the Americans. In this county I found out that the Filipinos were in fact the real heroes.

We filed out of the church, and not a moment too soon. Gregory looked like he couldn’t take another minute of so much attention, but he stuck it out because he really had a deeply held religious belief. Rudy had left after the betel-nut revelation. The Agta were just too shy for large gatherings of new people, even if they were almost exclusively Agta.

A storm was coming in and we decided to return immediately to Santa Ana before it hit. It was low tide, and our boat was stranded in a few inches of water. With seven strong men pushing, the *Agta* left a trail of blue paint in the harbor.

“Sister!” Gregory shouted in my ear and I awoke with a jolt. “It’s raining!”

I pulled the tarp over me and fell back asleep. I awoke again at the pier in San Vicente, where our party of three took a tricycle to my place. I arranged for the tricycle to take them home and paid the fare.

Gregory asked, “When are you coming back to Santa Clara?” I did a

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little math on my fingers and told him.

“Could you bring Ed with you? We want to talk about land.”

16 THE ONES TEACHING THE LANGUAGE

Some linguists estimate that a third of the more than 7,000 languages spoken on our planet will disappear during the twenty-first century. If the languages have no written form and have not been recorded, once gone, they can never be revived. This would be an enormous loss of culture and history and, as our planet's languages fade away, there will be fewer and fewer opportunities for researchers to study and understand the many ways that the human mind has developed for communication.

The dimensions of language extinction are only beginning to be understood. Linguists alone can't do the job of saving all the languages. The speakers must become involved in the process of education, training, and documentation necessary to keep their languages and their cultures alive. Fortunately, training programs are beginning to pop up in some parts of the world to teach native speakers of endangered languages to do just that.

As a graduate student at the University of Hawai'i, I had helped form the Language Documentation Training Center to pair native speakers of under-documented and endangered languages with linguists to train them in the techniques of language documentation. The teams create websites of the languages' vocabularies and stories and also begin to analyze their sounds and grammar.

For example, does the language have Subject-Verb-Object order, like English, or Verb-Subject-Object order, like Agta? Does it have 20 consonants, like English, or 15, like Agta, which lacks such sounds as *f*, *v*, and *z*? Some of the program participants have gone on to do language work in their home countries, and one young Indonesian man successfully lobbied his local government to include vernacular-language education in elementary schools. But such programs are still quite rare.

I sat drinking coffee in the open kitchen of my boarding house. There was no such thing as coffee pots, filters, or ground coffee in Santa Ana—

everybody drank instant—and there was no fresh milk despite an abundance of cows, goats and water buffalo. I had read somewhere that, unlike Americans, many Filipino adults were lactose intolerant. As my mind was struggling to grasp this great tragedy, two Agta emerged from a tricycle in front of my boarding house.

When I greeted Gregory's brother Unday and sister-in-law Nagi, I smelled alcohol. They spoke in Agta but were hard to understand. They said that people wanted to kill them, and I heard the Agta word for "escape." Eden's sister Edisa came from next door to see what the commotion was about.

Edisa listened, nodding, and said, "So, you guys used to be in the NPA?" That was the communist guerilla group that had threatened to kidnap someone in Santa Ana, and had used Bill and Eden's boarding house as an outpost.

The drunk Agta couple was embarrassed and didn't deny it. I didn't know what else to do, so I walked them to the tricycle and paid the driver to take them to Santa Clara. As they drove away, Edisa just shook her head and went back into her house. I was worried for them. There was an ongoing war between the NPA and the Philippine Army, and it was widely known that the NPA murdered defectors to prevent them from becoming informers.

Ed had made arrangements with Gregory for us to visit a nearby Agta camp to look at land, with me tagging along to do interviews. When Gregory arrived early the next day, I asked him what he was hoping to find.

"My cousin sold that land, that's our problem. We Agta didn't want land before. We just wanted to move around. Plant in one place, stay there a season or two. Move to a new place."

That was classic subsistence agriculture. Cut down the trees, burn the shrubbery, and plant between the stumps. No fertilizer needed; the ashes were great for the soil. After a few plantings the soil grew less productive, and the Agta moved on while the first area recovered. It had worked great for some 10,000 years, but now that slash-and-burn life was coming to an end.

An hour later, with Ed on his motorcycle and Gregory and me following in a tricycle and after a stop to buy tobacco, our caravan veered off the main road and onto a dirt path that followed a winding river. Gregory pointed as we made sharp turns, and we bumped and shook until the path ended near a wooden house.

"We have to cross the river. Leave your motorcycle here," Gregory called out, but Ed had other plans. As I waded into the fast current, he

plunged the bike directly into the river, accelerated across, and parked in the shade while I was still up to my knees in water. Waiting for us on a mat under a tree were Gregory's brother Unday and his wife Nagi, with Doreen and a few other Agta I didn't know. It was obviously quicker to walk here from Santa Clara than to ride.

After we settled down with them by the river, Ed called Gregory over to show him his motorcycle.

"You turn the key and push this button to start, then you crank the handle."

Every language that isn't totally isolated borrows words from other languages. Ed was talking in Ilokano, but he might as well have been using Spanish or English. Brakes—*preno*—from Spanish, except with a p instead of an f because Ilokano didn't have an f sound, and English handle, pedal, and gear.

Ed sat behind Gregory and took him for a spin. Gregory looked like a kid on that bike compared to Ed. Then it was Gregory's turn to solo. He pressed the start button but didn't crank the handle fast enough, stalling it. And then again. Finally, Rudy took over and started it for him, and the bike jumped and lurched as the Agta man gave it a turn through a field of high grass and sharp stickers.

When the bike stalled again, Gregory ran over and helped push it uphill to a larger clearing, where they took turns driving. I asked to give it a try. The thing jerked and jumped under my control, too, but after a few spins, I got the hang of it.

"Wow, how come it doesn't jump when you drive it, sister?" Rudy called.

"I can drive a stick! Just never drove a motorcycle before," I yelled as I raced through the weeds.

As the afternoon grew hotter, we retreated to a small hut, where Gregory tried to convince the local folks to help me with my linguistic work. First a woman sang a lullaby so soft it could have put us to sleep, and then her husband Landon, speaking Agta almost exactly like Gregory did, told me a story:

"Honey, go to town please. Go mill rice at our Ilokano friend's house because we don't have any food," said the young, recently married man.

His wife said, "Tomorrow, midday, I will meet you at the pass. I will have a heavy load if I get a lot of rice."

At dusk, an Agta raiding party from a nearby village arrived looking for revenge. The husband heard the screams of his neighbors and parents who lived upstream.

"Agay! Aah!" they yelled when the raiders shot them with arrows. The husband shot an arrow, and it was a good shot. He hit one of the raiders, but the raiders killed his neighbors and his parents. He didn't have any more arrows—he should just run. They shot an arrow at his back. He ducked his head.

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In the middle of the night, the young bride got worried that something had happened to her groom. She crossed over a mountain and reached the pass. She saw her husband sitting down. She set down the rice and tobacco, and made rice cakes.

"Honey, eat these rice cakes that I made."

"Put them there, I am full from the smell of them," the young man said. The woman touched him.

"Please don't touch me, my body hurts. I was slicing bamboo grass," the young man said. "Let's get going to the river."

"Why?" she asked.

"Me and my parents and your parents quarreled," said the young man.

She didn't know that he was a ghost, and they left. The next night, they lay down at dusk. She touched her husband.

"Don't touch me, I feel sick. Maybe I have a fever," said the ghost.

"Why are you changed, honey?" asked the young woman. "You don't want to touch me anymore. Why are you doing this?"

In the morning, the young woman rushed to make food again. "Come, honey, let's eat. There is plenty of food left over from yesterday," she said.

After they ate, the ghost said, "Let's go to the mountains." They climbed one mountain. They went down again. They climbed another mountain. They went around four tall peaks. They caught a small pig. They made their camp at a river, and the young woman cut a wilted tree.

"Char the animal, and I will go lie down," the ghost said.

The young woman quickly charred the pig and sliced it up. Then she roasted the meat on the fire and, when it was roasted, she pulled it out of the pot for him.

"Come here, honey, let's eat the meat."

The ghost ate two slices and felt sick from eating so much rich food. He saw that some young men were floating pigs downstream on a raft. They passed the ghost, and he saw his friend was the last one.

"Friend, come here, I have something to tell you," the ghost called out.

His friend, who was an orphan, paddled his raft and landed it next to him. He unpacked his betel-nut chewing pack, and made himself lime. The ghost began to cry.

"Why are you crying, my friend?" the orphan asked.

"I'm not, my eye hurts because I got something in it," said the ghost. "My friend, there is something I would like to ask you. I'm a ghost. My wife is a person. I'm not the same as my wife, my friend. If you want, you should be the one to marry her. Just live together."

"If this is what you want, my friend, then yes."

"This, then, is our decision. Tomorrow afternoon, come here, and I will bewitch her," said the ghost. "You know that I'm not the same as her anymore. I feel sorry for my wife."

His friend left. Night came, and the couple slept. In the middle of the night, the woman was restless and touched her husband. He was cold, and his eyes glowed. She screamed, "Your eyes are glowing!"

“No, that’s just a firefly. Scoot over because my body hurts,” he said. The woman didn’t go near him for the rest of the night.

The afternoon arrived and the wind blew downstream. The ghost bewitched her. The woman fell asleep. He put a blanket on his wife, picked her up, and loaded her onto his friend’s boat.

“Friend,” said the ghost, “our wife, our wife has not tasted my anger or my blows. I took care of her when I married her.” The ghost began to cry. “I’m not the same as my wife.”

The Agta man, the orphan, said, “I’m going, my friend. I will take our wife home. Don’t worry, I won’t hit her. I will take good care of her.”

He paddled the raft downstream. The young woman was still sleeping. The ghost went into the forest and wept.

At the first light of dawn, the wild rooster crowed. The woman began to stir. She looked around at the house.

“Agay!” she said. “This is a new place.” The young woman screamed, “Why are you kidnapping me? Where is my husband?”

“Child,” the young man said. “What use is your husband now? He’s a ghost, you aren’t the same anymore. That’s why I got you. He had me take you. Your parents, your in-laws, all your neighbors, they were slaughtered. The raiders killed everyone. Your husband, he’s a ghost. That’s why he didn’t touch you. Sister, you were bewitched.”

She didn’t stop crying until the afternoon, and then she stared at the orphan. She thought that he was very handsome. The orphan looked at the young woman and saw that she was very beautiful. Why, he wondered, hadn’t the ghost and his wife had any children?

One month passed. “What are you thinking, my child? Do you want me?” he asked.

“Yes, my brother. My husband is a ghost.”

So they got married. One year passed and she gave birth to a boy. The ghost came back to be the midwife and assist with the birth. When she was recovering from the labor, she said, “Don’t show yourself to me anymore, because it hurts me. You and I are not the same anymore. Don’t ever come back here. Marry a ghost like yourself. I have a new husband, a person like me.”

While the Agta went fishing, I told Ed that Gregory had asked to come with me to Manila, and I was thinking of taking him.

He said, “You need to give him a T-shirt that says, ‘If I get lost, please call this number.’” We both laughed trying to imagine Gregory in Manila.

That night we sat by the light of a burning old flip-flop and Landon, the Agta husband, bombarded me with obscure Agta words that I eagerly wrote in the small notebook I kept in my pocket for that purpose. Agta vocabulary is as complex as that of English, and there was no end to the words I could collect. He said, “*Mabanta*,” which meant “to tire of being in

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the same position for a long time.” A few weeks later on the bus to Manila, I would fully appreciate that Agta word. For now, I just smiled and wrote it down.

As we walked back along the dirt road to the highway, I told Gregory I would take him to Manila, but I was worried he might get lost, and that he should take as his companion someone that understood...

“How to read?” he cut in. I was going to say how to get by in the city, but I guess if you were lost in Manila, it would be important to know how to read.

“I’ll take Rudy with me, he knows how to read. When are we going? Next week?” I had just meant that I would take him eventually, before I went back to America, but Agta don’t plan very far in advance, except for the rice they plant every summer. We walked silently for a while; I was thinking about the logistics for the trip when Gregory said, rather ominously, “Even if they are Agta, don’t give any money to the people who come around asking. They aren’t the ones teaching the language.”

17 LOST AND FOUND

The trail was peaceful, the day quiet and hot. I had no companion. When I arrived at the Agta camp my house was gone and my tarp was missing, but I wasn't worried. Dalang had borrowed it for a wedding before leaving for Bolos, but it was now being held as collateral for a pig he bought on credit for the wedding feast.

Instead of a one-room hut, Gregory now had three rooms, which simply meant that there were now two new bamboo floors, bringing the whole house to about 12 feet square. The hut behind Gregory's had been abandoned due to a ghost sighting—these things were not explained to me—and now formed part of the roof and walls of Gregory's hut. I rested my backpack on the smallest of the floor surfaces, and Sisi told me that Gregory and Rudy were in the forest.

In Santa Ana I had decided to take up swimming in a fit of small-town boredom, and on the beach near my guesthouse I had found a very small cardboard box with an even smaller orange kitten inside. It looked up at me with large, frightened, very cute eyes, so I took it home. The kitten liked to sleep on my head, a good spot for its own purposes, but I hadn't gotten much sleep with a cat on my head. I wasn't sorry to have to wait for Gregory as I lay down under the still-unfinished roof and fell asleep.

When I awoke, Gregory was back and I got a phone call from Ed. The process for requesting land from the government could take years, but as soon as they filed the first petition, nobody else could claim it.

The Agta have an egalitarian society. They have no word for "chief" or "judge." If they got in a dispute with someone, one of the parties moved away. It was the way of hunter-gatherer societies everywhere, but the government required a leader to represent the community.

I handed the phone to Gregory. "Put your ear here," I coached him.

He said, "Hello sir, yes sir. Okay sir," and handed me back the phone.

“He wants us to have a meeting.” It was arranged for Monday.

Rudy set off on a walk up to the coast to where the 90-year-old Cesar lived. He carried a small backpack and a .22-caliber gun that Gregory had just bought with the money I had been giving him.

He explained, “I thought someone might try to hurt you; there are a lot of bad Ilokano people here. Rudy needs to take the gun for protection. Ilokano people kill Agta who don’t pay their debts.”

I didn’t ask any questions. I should have, but I didn’t know what to say. There were a lot of things I didn’t know about the Agta and the Ilokano.

Gregory and I spent the next day translating. In the evening, a young Agta boy appeared at Gregory’s hut to announce that there was a large group of visitors—Rudy had returned with the people from the coast. Gregory hurried to straighten up and make room for the newcomers to sleep in his expanded hut.



FIGURE 7 ED (LOWER RIGHT) AND SOME AGTA MEN HOLD A MEETING

The next day, the men began to build a meeting hall. They started by cutting down bamboo, which they sliced into strips several inches wide to form the seats and backs for four bamboo benches and one long-legged table. Rudy asked for tricycle fare to save the effort of walking the short distance to Limbus to bring the next group, so I gave him fare to go there, but not to return, because the whole community would be with him. Disgusted with the exact fare, not nearly enough to buy whatever it was he

really wanted, I saw him walking off in the direction of Limbus instead of toward the road to catch a tricycle.

When he returned, four of the families had motorcycle batteries—none were charged—and after a community dinner, Gregory sent two young men to town to charge two batteries, while the men that remained rigged the other two together so that they had enough juice to produce a little light. Soon someone called for dancing, and a large stereo and a bucket full of tapes was produced. We only had enough power for either light or music, so the light was disconnected.

“Play ‘*Ocho-Ocho*,” they cried. This Tagalog pop song was an international sensation and the Agta girls, especially the teenager, put their hands on their knees and arched their backs and twisting and spinning their bodies just like the Filipino college students did in Hawai‘i. Next they played the “Spaghetti Song” and one little six-year-old wiggled her body just like a wet noodle in the spotlight of my strong American flashlight until the kids and I and all the other adults, sober and drunk, were roaring with laughter.

The young boys came back with undercharged batteries, but the dim light was enough for Gregory to grab a guitar and start playing. He started with his favorite, the only one he knew in Agta, a Christian song he had translated. He went on to sing all the Ilokano Christian songs he knew until everyone and everything was exhausted, including the batteries, and we drifted off to a listless sleep full of crying children and loud drunk men.

Ed stood at the head of the table in the brand-new bamboo outdoor meeting space. The Agta men and some of the women and I sat on the benches under a tarp roof that I had provided. We had a lovely view of the hills off to our right.

Ed held out both hands as if trying to reach toward the Agta and explained, “It can take years, but this group in the Batanes, they got the whole island. I was planning on asking for the Agta land here in Santa Clara, for the land in Limbus, and for a large patch of land in between, so that the heads of both of the river valleys will be Agta land.”

The Agta were impressed. Ed told them that they needed someone who could read and write to go to Tuguegarao to file papers. Gregory was illiterate, so they elected the unreliable Rudy. Although Rudy’s wife Amelia was better at both skills, no women were considered. When Ed said that Rudy didn’t have to be the overall leader, there was an audible sigh of relief from the men, and Landon was chosen as the president of the group, with Gregory as the leader of the Santa Clara community and another man for the coastal community.

The requirements for proving that the Agta were a true indigenous community that had really occupied this land for years were listed in tiny print on a single piece of paper. More than a few bullet points were going to fall in my court, including “names of places derived from native dialects” and anything that required a GPS or a digital camera. Ed wanted me to visit a nearby burial ground with my equipment, but first I had to go to Manila to get my camera fixed. It seemed like nobody in the province had ever seen a digital camera, let alone knew how to fix one.

Ed started in with a genealogical survey, asking the oldest person present to name his grandparents, but the Agta instead asked me about lunch, and I translated their request to Ed. We ate about a dozen small fish, a satchel full of leafy green vegetables, two giant *agal*—the tasty, potatoey white insides of a certain kind of palm tree—a sack full of “mandarins”—actually a sour fruit somewhere between an orange and a lemon that was a hit with the small children and a certain citrus-starved linguist—and, of course, rice.

Ed continued until late in the afternoon, filling in five genealogy charts, but I knew that many Agta had spouses that had died, or simply two wives that Ed wasn’t asking about. It was going to take him a long time to sort it out. He arranged to meet some of us in town to continue the process. The Agta would bring the ancient Cesar, who hadn’t made it to the meeting, to help fill in gaps.

The crowd began to trickle away, but two families from Limbus remained behind; one of the husbands was curled up in a blanket shivering with a fever. I gave him some medicine, and into the evening they began to talk about me as though I had not been studying their language for the previous five months.

“She should pay our tricycle fare.”

“She should be paying Gregory a fixed salary.”

“It’s not fair.” Even Gregory’s wife Sisi joined in, although she knew that I could understand.

After we ate dinner and almost everyone had retired to bed, Landon, now the President of the Cagayan Agta, stayed up with Gregory and me, talking in the open-air meeting hall now denuded of its tarp roof. They told me that everyone was wary of Ed because they had gone through this process before. When Gregory was still a teenager, an Ilokano man had said he would help them get financial assistance from the government. The Agta held meetings, elected a leader, took a census, and had everyone photographed. The man went to Manila, got a million pesos—\$20,000, which seemed impossibly large; big sums of money tend to grow into enormous sums over the years after they’re lost—and he disappeared with their cash. I reminded them that Ed had been born and raised in Santa Ana and had lived through the same things they had. He could ask them how

old they had been when the logging companies left and could guess their ages. They could go down to the city hall and see him, but the Agta still weren't sure they could trust him.

Knowing that I would have to get the names of every streamlet in the valley for their application, I began asking questions: "Why is this place named Kattot?"

"Because we used to eat a lot of sweet potatoes and they made us fart."

The Agta word for "fart" is *attot*, but it seemed an unlikely explanation. I went on and asked about an area named Mangobilan, and they told me it meant "the place for stuffing things in the waistline of clothes," because that's what they did with the betel nut they collected there. I asked about places with Spanish names. "Why *Campo*?"

"Because that's where the Japanese camped. What year was it that the Japanese came here?" asked President Landon.

"It must have been 1943," I guessed.

"Whew, that was a long time ago. What year is it now?"

"2006."

Landon said, "The Japanese were afraid of us and they tried to kill us. We killed them with our bows and arrows. One time, the Japanese got one of our arrows, and they cut it open to see what made it fly." He laughed and looked at me, "Where is Japan?"

"Past Taiwan." They knew that Taiwan lay just across the open water to the north.

"Where's America?"

"Way far away, that way," I said, pointing east.

"But you can call there on a cell phone," Gregory explained, and checked with me. "Not just text messages, calls too?"

"Yup, as long as there is a signal."

Landon had once owned a cell phone, and told us about climbing a hill in Bolos Point to make a call. "When I got to the top of the hill, the phone went beep, beep, beep. I had a text message." He was quite proud.

"But you don't know how to read," Gregory pointed out.

"Yeah, but I just hit the button to call the person back. Sister, do you think you could leave your cell phone for me when you go back to America? Then we could call you in America. We could call you on Christmas."

I said I would buy one for him in Manila. I wanted to be able to call him when I was in town. The two men looked at my phone, and Landon said, "See, the numbers are easy." Gregory agreed.

That night, by some miracle, only a cute kitten on my head disturbed my sleep and everyone was so exhausted that no one cried "*Pamalakedan*," "It's daytime already," at dawn and we just slept until someone from another family came for coffee. Gregory asked again for cash to pay a debt. It was

the same debt as before, and each time we met he was giving me little hints of the true dimensions of the large balance he owed. Gregory helped me transcribe another story until the computer beeped, and I had to turn it off for lack of batteries.

My phone played the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony from its resting spot in the banana tree, the only place with a good signal. It was a text message from Eden: *A storm is coming in, take care of yourself.*

I told Gregory and we were quiet for a while, until Gregory said, "Do you know the Agta word *masegkat*?"

I told him I knew it meant "lazy."

"*Makesongot*?" It meant "poor."

"*Mangimon*?" I didn't know that one. He said it was the Agta word for "jealous." He said no more, but that night when they assumed I was sleeping, Gregory spoke quietly to Sisi while they lay in their nearby hut.

"The other Agta want sister to give them money too. But they don't understand that I am the one working. They just don't understand."

It began to drizzle. In the morning, the sky was covered with dark clouds and gusts of wind blew swirls of dirt into my tricycle as I returned to Santa Ana.

The day before Gregory, Rudy, and I were to go to Manila, I was sitting in my room adding new words to the dictionary growing in my computer when Eric, the boarding-house manager, said I had visitors. I went to the thatched-roof cabana in the yard, where Rudy and his wife Amelia sat quietly.

When Rudy saw me, he asked, "Are we still going to Gonzaga to get your tarp?"

Although this was the first I had heard of this plan, I told him I was ready. We walked to the main road, flagged down a jeep to Gonzaga's town center. With storefronts, several pharmacies, and a small university, it was much bigger than Santa Ana. On a small side road, Rudy approached a group of teenage boys who lurked next to some tricycles and asked for a ride to where the Agta lived. He negotiated a price of 50 pesos round trip and our tricycle bounced down the road, which ran out of pavement as soon as we lost sight of the town center.

We stopped at a concrete house near a cross road, where Rudy got out and explained to a confused man that we were looking for the barangay captain. Someone had borrowed the white woman's tarp without permission, he said, and someone else had taken it from him to pay for a pig, and now he refused to give the tarp back to the sister. Here he pointed at me. I kept my mouth shut and counted on the pull of being in a country

with an irrational love of Americans.

The barangay captain wasn't there, so the tricycle headed off on the side road, finally pattered to a stop at a steep hill. The Agta couple and I got out and walked up the hill while the driver raced the small engine, which choked and coughed before roaring and emitting an immense cloud of blue smoke that hung in the clear air as he coaxed the vehicle to the top. We rejoined our tricycle and the apologetic young driver, and bumped along until we stopped in the middle of a vast field of corn and rice at a small cement hut with a tin roof. I was surprised to see three Agta men and a woman come to the door; I had assumed my tarp was in the hands of Ilokanos.

I sat on a small wooden bench outside their house while the men squatted in the yard—the typical Filipino way of sitting without a chair—and the women stood and watched. I apparently needed no introduction, and neither did the purpose of the visit. A light drizzle started to fall, and we took refuge under their tin awning, which punctuated the discussion with melodic pings.

"It's a shame," the possessor of the tarp lamented, "The government gave us these nice houses, and the government got us this land, but now our people just leave their houses. You're going through the slow work of getting land from the government." Here he looked at Rudy and Amelia with pain in his face and stretched out his hand toward the horizon as if he were rolling out the many years that lay ahead of them.

"But it's a waste; you'll want to leave too. It would have been easier if sister had just bought you some beautiful land," he said, as though I were a fabulously rich person who wasn't there, and didn't understand his Ilokano laced with a handful of Agta words.

It was Rudy's turn. "Sir Ed wanted us to join up with the Labin Agta and live on their land, but Uncle Gregory didn't want to. He's stubborn."

These young Agta men agreed it would be easier to join with the other Agta who already had land, but I sided with the uncles. To join with the other group would mean speaking in Ilokano to communicate, because the various languages called "Agta" were so different from each other, and that would almost certainly bring about the death of both languages.

After our gracious hosts served us a lunch of rice and bitter-melon leaves, the tarp was presented to me with apologies. "We still want to talk with Dalang about his debt," the man said as I loaded the tarp into the waiting tricycle.

We bumped our way down the road, past the barangay captain's house. People waiting to get to town flagged us down and piled in until the motorcycle and side car were carrying six people and a 30-pound tarp, and still our vehicle was flagged down by even more people with written orders, each scrawled on a piece of paper with the person's name, the torn sheet

wrapping up the appropriate wad of cash. Powdered milk for baby. Pampers. Cigarettes. The young driver threw them all irreverently into a small tray in the sidecar.

It seemed like a crazy system, but it worked. The driver would purchase the orders in town, and when he returned this way, he or another driver would deliver the items.

In Gonzaga I fished 50 pesos in coins out of my pocket and dropped them into the driver's hand. He looked at me like I had just given him a pile of water-buffalo droppings.

"What's this?"

It turned out that the price was actually 150 pesos, to which Rudy agreed, but when I gave that sum to the young man he wanted 150 pesos each way. Rudy again agreed with the driver, even when I asked him in Agta. We walked up the road to find a bus to take us back to Santa Ana and stopped in the shade next to a woman selling corn.

"Does the white person speak Ilokano?" she asked. Rudy said that I did, and I told her that the tricycle driver had cheated us. Rudy chimed in, his voice full of outrage, "He told me 150 pesos, and then later said it was 300."

Back in Santa Ana I gave Rudy money—half for his wife Amelia and half for Gregory's wife Sisi—so they would have food while Gregory, Rudy, and I were in Manila. The Agta couple got on a tricycle and drove into the fading light.

18 HUNTER-GATHERERS IN MANILA

I met Gregory, Rudy and Amelia in the Santa Ana Centro. Ed had told me not to let Amelia on the bus because she would refuse to get off at her stop and tag along all the way to Manila.

“Well, let’s get Amelia a ride to Gonzaga,” I said, and was greeted with silence. Gregory, as spokesman, said I needed to not only give Amelia more money, but also buy a whole new set of clothes for him. He argued long and hard, but I refused and walked away to let them discuss the situation. After ten minutes, I crossed the highway to where they sat in the white concrete bus-stop shed.

“We’re not going to Manila, the soldiers might shoot us,” said Gregory, and I tried my hardest not to laugh. He was terrible at making excuses.

“That’s your decision. We were only going to Manila because you wanted to. It’s not for work. I promised you we’d go, so we’re going.”

“We’ll go back to the camp. Can you please find out from sir Ed when we will go on our land survey?”

I texted Ed and in a few minutes he walked from the market.

“So you guys don’t want to go to Manila?” Ed was always direct with the Agta. After a lengthy discussion about money, Manila, Gregory’s broken flip-flops, and land surveys, they must have changed their minds, because when Ed asked again, the answer came, “Yes, sir, we are going to Manila.”

So Ed took off and Amelia didn’t. I once again got the Agta silent treatment, so I told them, “No tickets to Manila until Amelia leaves,” sending us into another round-robin discussion that ended with a compromise: a tricycle ride for Amelia to Gonzaga and new flip-flops for Gregory in the market, but no new shirt. I gave him an old T-shirt of mine that fit him perfectly, and he had to wear Rudy’s spare pants and tie them with a string instead of a new belt.

“Just one T-shirt? I don’t have anything to change into.”

The three of us waited in a tense silence for several hours until we finally boarded the air-conditioned bus for Manila. Gregory told me later he spent the entire time up to the moment he stepped on the bus undecided about whether he would go.

Rudy asked me anxiously if the bus would stop before we got to Manila, and I told him it would stop a bunch of times so we could go to the bathroom and eat.

When it did stop, I got off to stretch my legs and read a sign by the men’s-room door to Gregory: two pesos to use the bathroom. He was appalled, but took the coins I gave him and explained the deal to Rudy. By our next stop, bundled in the jackets and socks I had brought for the full-blast air-conditioning, we gladly bounded off the bus and warmed our frozen arms and legs in the humid air. I walked to the bathroom and they followed me until a woman stopped them. “The men’s is there!” They made me promise to tell them in the future where the men’s bathroom was. After another half a dozen stops, we were greeted by the early-dawn lights of a bustling major city.

Gregory and Rudy stared through the window and quietly pointed things out to each other. Gregory shouted, “Agay, look at how big that building is!” using the Agta word that meant, roughly, “dude.” The driver let us off on a street near our hotel, and we walked along a dirty lane where two-story, weather-beaten shacks crowded the sidewalks. Through the doors, we saw children bathing in buckets and tired-looking women cooking breakfast.

“This is just like Tuguegarao,” Gregory said, disappointed. I thought it was nothing like Tuguegarao. I asked a newspaper vendor for directions, and after a dozen more blocks we saw our hotel, a large four-story affair with a twelve-passenger tour bus parked outside. We stepped over what looked and smelled like raw sewage and into the handsome brick hotel, climbed to the second floor, and checked into two rooms.

I showed Gregory and Rudy to theirs, a simple room with wooden furniture and floors and an old air-conditioning unit in the window that whirred loudly as it blew cool air.

In the bathroom, I saw a water heater in the shower, so I explained to them how to use it.

“How do you get cold water?” they both asked. I turned the handle for the faucet, and when a stream of water poured out, Gregory laughed with amazement. As he watched the water swirl in the tub in obvious delight, it came to me that he was probably seeing this as one of the peak achievements of civilization, and I had to agree that it probably was before I retired to my room for a nap and a shower.

I awoke and went to check on my Agta friends and found they had

ordered Coca-Colas from the front desk but still hadn't mastered hot and cold running water. I showed them again. As we gathered our things to go out for the day, Gregory asked, "Where can we get drinking water?"

"Why not from the faucet?"

"That water is dirty. It sits in pipes all day." I bought them each a bottle of water, and we got a tricycle to the nearest shopping mall.

My phone beeped. Ed had texted: *Gud mornin! hw r u & ur companions? Hapi Bday!*

It was, in fact, my 26th, and I was traveling with people who didn't know what birthdays were.

We got dropped off at the shopping mall, but it wouldn't open until 10, so I found a small place by the side of the road and ordered coffee for three. Americans attract attention, and soon a large, fair-skinned Filipino man sat down at the next table.

"My name is Joe." He proceeded with the standard list of questions (which isn't considered rude in the Philippines) concerning my marital status and age.

I changed the subject. "Is the Manila zoo near here?" It was at the top of Gregory's must-see list.

"It's near." The half-drunk man gave us directions.

"No!" A woman at an adjacent table who had been listening to our conversation protested and told us to go the opposite way.

The mall opened and we entered. It was huge and icy cold. "Those are the moving stairs I told you about," Rudy, the big-city expert, coached Gregory, who jumped with both feet onto the escalator and rode to the top, his body rigid.

"What are those called? Elevators?" Rudy asked.

"No, elevators are like a box that goes straight up and down and escalators are the moving stairs."

"Elevator. Escalator." Rudy laughed at the silly sounding words. I stopped at an ATM, and they were astonished to see money come out of a machine but too shy to ask how it worked.

"It comes from America," I said, and realized that my explanation was meaningless and only confirmed their suspicion that America was so rich that it could expel money out of machines in the Philippines.

I bought some coffee at a supermercado. Later, Gregory would tell his friends, "We went in this big store, and there was everything! Coffee and toothpaste and shoes and clothes and cups and plates." Gregory and Rudy asked me to buy them soap and toothbrushes.

Outside the supermarket Gregory dragged us to a row of guitars and picked one up.

"Excuse me, are you going to pay for that?" the young sales clerk asked him, and turned to me. "Can I help you with anything?" Gregory put it

down, but I told him in Agta to choose one. I negotiated the price rather unsuccessfully, and Gregory walked away with a brand-new guitar.

Gregory and Rudy shied away when I asked a police officer for directions to the zoo. In a jeepney, a small bus-like vehicle, I asked the driver to let us know when to get off. Gregory and Rudy sat close to me and when all the other passengers had departed and it seemed we had been in the jeepney for far too long, Gregory asked if I knew where I was going. The driver assured me the zoo was near, and sure enough, he let us off right in front of the sign. I paid the special entrance fee for foreigners, and we walked in past the vendors selling candy and sodas.

“An elephant!” Gregory shouted. “Look how he picks things up with his nose. It’s like a hand!” It was the first live elephant he’d ever seen. “Where’s its wife?” Gregory thought for a few seconds. “That’s sad, he has no other elephants.”

The elephant moped around its small concrete world, picking up scraps of straw and occasionally spitting on passers-by. A man in a straw hat hoisted two bales of green grass into the tiny enclosure. The elephant eagerly untied the bales and ate the tasty grass ties first, then tossed the bales around until the grass was everywhere. He threw bunches onto his back, let the grass wiggle down its sides, carefully picked up the clumps with his trunk, and ate them.

“Hey, look!” Gregory pointed to the next area. A dozen scrawny deer grazed in a dirt pasture.

I said, “American deer are bigger. Easily as high as my chest.” Gregory laughed in astonishment.

“Look, a *bannagam*,” he exclaimed. I read the English sign: “Sailfin Water Lizard.” I got out my notebook and jotted down the Agta, the English, and the scientific names. Gregory pointed to the next cage, saying, “Another *bannagam*.” The sign said “Green Iguana.” This would be more difficult than I thought.

The wild pigs looked just like the ones the Agta caught—small and ferocious and not at all cute. We moved on to the crocodile lake to find a statue, painted green, of a ten-foot-long crocodile half submerged in the water. I was going to complain to the zoo about not labeling statues until it blinked, and we edged away. There were bored monkeys, two in each tiny cage, one watching me as he lazily unpeeled a banana.

“He’s like an old man,” Rudy laughed.

“He’s not eating good fruit,” Gregory, the native expert, informed me.

“Look at this giant monkey!” Rudy pointed, “What’s this one called, sister?”

“O-RANG-ah-tang.” I said it slowly, and Gregory and Rudy repeated the word. Orangutan is Indonesian for “person of the forest,” and I explained that if the monkeys were cousins of people, the orangutan was

our sibling.

“Look here, sister,” Gregory teased the orangutan, and the orangutan smiled for my camera.

At a group of small wire cages, ferret-looking animals stared out at us. Gregory said, “*Madipa*. Are you going to write that down?” The English-language sign said “Civet,” but when I checked the Ilokano later, the definition was “Philippine squirrel.” Maybe my definition should just say “small furry creature with beady eyes and a funny nose.”

Rudy stopped as the path climbed a low hill and turned away from the animals at a spot where we could see the city. “Is that one person’s house? Is your house in America like that?” He indicated a skyscraper apartment building.

“No, each window is one family’s house. In America, my house is like the white guy’s in Santa Ana. We have four or five rooms.” That still seemed impossibly large to them.

“Hey, look at this! What do you call this?” Gregory was overlooking a swampy moat with two submerged monsters; only their nostrils and eyes broke the surface of their pond. A passerby told him, “Hippopotamus.”

“Do they have legs under the water? They’re like giant pigs!” Gregory and Rudy were transfixed. When the massive animals lumbered onto the shore, mud and water pouring from their backs, their excitement grew. “Look, it does have legs!” “Look at it eat!”

“What do you guys want to do now?” I asked as we rested, once again watching their favorite, the lonely elephant. Rudy suggested karaoke, which I vetoed, so they decided to see a movie.

The jeepney driver dropped us in a shopping area near our hotel. The first theater we saw was playing a porn movie, the second a horror flick, and the third *Basic Instinct 3*. A beggar woman sitting on the dirty sidewalk outside the theater grabbed at the leg of my pants. Gregory and Rudy laughed. “That woman was crazy.”

“No. She was begging.”

Gregory asked, “Why? Doesn’t she have a family?” I had no answer.

The Agta men soon grew tired of the heat and the pavement and the smog. We crossed a small bridge that covered a stinking river of trash and sewage.

“What is that?” Gregory asked.

“It’s a river. They call those flying saucers,” I said, pointing to a floating pile of human waste. “There’s water under the garbage,” I raised my hand until it was directed at a spot in the distance where a circle of liquid appeared, soon swallowed by the floating trash.

“Do people live there?” Gregory pointed to rickety wooden slum houses that hung precariously over the river of human waste. “I wouldn’t want to.”

At the shopping mall, the two Agta hung back while I asked a security

guard if there was a movie theater. There wasn't, she apologized. We went inside to escape the heat and entered a maze of tiny retailers selling cheap shirts and jeans.

"Maybe you could buy us some clothes." I agreed, but first, I needed a cup of non-instant coffee and found it at "MacDo's," Philippine shorthand for McDonald's. We ordered three cups, a piece of pie, and a large order of French fries. Gregory tasted the greasy potatoes and made a face at the saltiness, but ate the pie. Rudy liked the fries.

We wandered the mall, until I saw a sign for a sale on blue jeans. Rudy picked out a pair and whispered in my ear, "They are 150 pesos," both pleased at his ability to read and amazed at the high price. Gregory found a pair, too. "Are you sure they'll fit?" He wrapped the waist of the jeans around his neck—the standard way of measuring pants in the Philippines—and they did.

Back at our hotel, Rudy and Gregory talked in Ilokano with the wife of the owner—they came from Cagayan—while I chatted with her son, who had grown up in Manila. The young man was nearly six feet tall, with light skin and a shaved head. He was getting a PhD in anthropology at the University of the Philippines, and he told me he spoke "Filipino."

"Filipino" was a project the Philippine government started in the 1970s. They took a dictionary of Tagalog, flavored it with words from other Philippine languages and respelled English words, and proclaimed it a new language that would unite the nation. But no one really spoke it; they just spoke Tagalog.

"Tagalog" was originally the name of the people centered near Manila Bay, for *taga-ilog*, "from the river". Manila Bay developed as the center for European trade after the Spanish conquered the city in the 16th century, and the Tagalog people in the area became more wealthy and powerful than other ethnic groups. When the Philippines formed as a nation with its capital in Manila, the Tagalog language was used and promoted throughout the country because it was the language of the Manila elite. The "Filipino" language initiative was an attempt to justify this status quo.

I changed the subject. He asked about my work with the Agta and what they did for a living. I explained in Tagalog that they collected *umay*.

"What's *umay*?" he asked in English.

"Rattan."

"Oh. Just speak English, honey," he said in a condescending tone that I ignored. In Manila, English was rapidly replacing Tagalog. In provincial capitals like Tuguegarao, Tagalog was supplanting Ilokano. And deep in the forests and along the remote coastline where I was working, through the invisible hand of globalization, Ilokano was replacing Agta. It was a game of musical chairs, and the Agta language could soon be left without a seat.

Over dinner Gregory asked if I would leave my new jacket with him

when I went home to America. I told him I would give him my old one and that I would leave most of my clothes and things to him and the other Agta.

He was a bit drunk, and sounded annoyed. “We’re not interested in the things you leave behind. What about the water buffalo you said you’d buy?” I told him that I would keep my word and buy the water buffalo. “Good. It will be just for me and my family. Not for all the Agta.”

Rudy said he wanted me to buy him a waterproof *lero*.

“What’s a *lero*?” I asked.

“You know, you wear it on your wrist, it tells the time.” The Ilokano word was *relo*, borrowed from Spanish *reloj*. I corrected him.

“*Lero*,” he said. The Agta language tended to avoid sequences of l’s and r’s, and this affected the way its speakers pronounced other languages, too. Rudy had a slight “foreign” accent in Ilokano.

Gregory addressed Rudy intentionally using “big” Agta words I didn’t know, and then he said to me, “Sisi would really like a small cassette player. They’re much cheaper here than in Cagayan.”

I told them what I had been saying for the last few months. “You do some work for me, and I’ll pay you. Besides, I already bought a guitar and new clothes.”

“But the guitar was for Uncle, what about me?” Rudy complained.

I set him straight, “Your uncle works for me. You haven’t done any work for me, not even catching fish.”

“I can catch fish. If I start in the morning and work all day, I can easily get five kilos of fish.”

I doubted the outrageous claim, but told him, “Yes, then I’ll give you some money, I’ll buy the fish.”

“You’ll need to buy ice, too, and a cooler, to keep all the fish from spoiling,” Rudy had gotten himself worked up. “Maybe you can help me buy my *makina*.”

“What machine?”

Gregory explained that he meant the engine for a boat that they hocked to Stephen, the Ilokano, and couldn’t afford to get back.

Rudy insisted, “I will catch all the fish, so can we go get my machine on the way back from Manila.” I repeated that he had to catch the fish first. I had to be careful about money, having just received an email saying that the government had denied me financial aid for my first semester back at the university after I left the Philippines.

The next morning, we caught a jeepney to a shopping mall that sold cell phones. I jumped off when the jeep slowed, and Gregory and Rudy jumped too—but just barely. They wouldn’t have if they hadn’t been prompted by the fear of being stranded in a teeming city occupied by one and a half million strangers, armed only with pieces of paper with my name and phone number.

The mall was closed, and by the time it opened, Ed had caught up with us. I bought Gregory a cell phone, programmed in my number and Ed's, and told Gregory that there are only two numbers: My name was long, and Ed's was short. "Then you just hit this blue button."

He tried it, and seemed to get it. "Can we call Stephen?" he asked. "I want to ask about my family." Stephen had a cell phone and went up to the camp a lot.

"Do you want me to put Stephen's number in the phone?" I put it in and showed Gregory. He looked confused. "I think it is better with just two numbers," he admitted. I deleted Stephen's number then called for him on my own phone. While Gregory was getting an update on his family, Ed had convinced the very young sales girl that all four of us were siblings. We just had different fathers, of course.

We rode the escalator, which Rudy and Gregory now enjoyed, and found a carnival-style shooting range. "Here's an electronic game where you can shoot ghosts," I told them. The Agta men looked terrified. But on a BB-gun range, Rudy and Gregory demonstrated their expert marksmanship while Ed missed by a mile—despite owning a gun in Santa Ana that could blow the head off a scrawny deer at 50 meters.

The only shows in Tagalog at the 12-screen theater at the shopping mall were horror movies. "Do you want to see a movie with ghosts?" Ed asked Gregory and Rudy, who emphatically shook their heads. The men decided on "Pirates of the Caribbean 2" in English. We had our choice of seats, being the only people in a cavernous theater that sat hundreds on an early Thursday afternoon.

As the air conditioning blew a Siberian wind over us, I started by translating a few things, but Gregory understood that the monsters were bad and which of the people were good, so I sat back and watched. Gregory was grateful when I explained some of the plot, and I imagined I could hear Ed doing the same for Rudy, but they were probably just discussing the special effects or the starlets in the skimpy costumes.

I asked, "Do you guys want to go see the ocean?" This was something they were keenly interested in. We caught a jeepney and switched to a second then a third, with Ed jumping wildly from one to the other and the three of us running across lanes of traffic to keep up, until we were at a spacious green park. We waited to cross the road, and I explained that we could go when the little man turned green. When the moment came and the cars and taxis and jeepneys all stopped, Gregory and Rudy were hesitant but then rushed across the road to try to catch up with the disappearing figure of the Santa Ana city social worker.

We followed Ed onto a beach and down to the Manila Baywalk, a posh section of town with waterfront restaurants and lit walkways marred only by the stench of the polluted bay. We found a restaurant where the

entertainment, a band, consisted of three scantily clad young women. Ed was very impressed with them, but the two Agta men seemed genuinely baffled as to why women would dress like that in a public place. The restaurant was quite expensive by Philippine standards, so I offered to pay for dinner and ordered everyone chicken, one of the more reasonably priced items on the menu. We were into our third round of beer when the enormous chicken meals came.

I had the waiter bring the check to me, and pulled out my credit card to pay discreetly, but Ed caught the action and insisted on paying. I insisted, too. Ed asked the waiter for the total. The man told Ed, and Gregory and Rudy were floored. I forked over the money, Ed returned his cash to his wallet, and when the waiter brought back the change, we got ready to leave.

“What about that?” Gregory pointed to a few coins still sitting on the table for a tip.

“Leave it,” I told him, and Gregory was stupefied. Much later, when events went so wrong, I came to recognize that this had been a turning point.

It was late, and Ed thought it would be dangerous to try to find a taxi. “I wish you had your bow and arrow,” he said, and Gregory replied, “Agay!” his usual reaction of amazement whenever he took Ed’s sense of humor literally. We found a jeepney, piled in, and headed back to the hotel, where Ed insisted it was time for another round of beer. When we met in his room, Ed pulled out a pen and paper.

“So, who is the sister of Linda Lappay?” Only Ed would be working into the fourth round of beer late at night in a hotel room in Manila. I just laughed and drank my beer until he put me to work correcting an interview he had translated with his good, but not flawless, English.

The next morning we checked out of our hotel, got some pictures developed, found the bus station, and thirteen hours later we were in Santa Ana. Rudy and Gregory had both come down with diarrhea—they hadn’t been careful enough to avoid the dirty piped water in Manila—and the bus trip was too cold for them. They had decided that they never wanted to live in Manila.

19 THE TREASURE HUNTER

The first Westerner to visit the Philippines was Ferdinand Magellan on his around-the-world journey in 1521. He initially traded with the Filipinos and courted allies, but proud and overconfident, he decided to take the side of one chief against another in a local war. During a battle, Magellan was hit in the leg by a poison arrow, then hacked with swords and stabbed with bamboo spears. He died where he fell on a lonely beach, the first, but not the last, Westerner to underestimate these islands and people. Within decades of Magellan's death, the Philippines became a Spanish colony. Spain brought Catholicism, trade, a crushing oppression, and the Spanish language to the Philippines.

There was knock on my door. I opened it and saw Sisi, in Gregory's new clothes, with the tiny baby on her breast and Dalang's wife at her side. A yellow sun hung over the ridge of the Sierra Madre Mountains. It was going to be a hot day.

I was glad that the two couples were not still fighting over borrowed money and the lost tarp that I had now recovered. The baby was sick, so we walked to the main street, stopped a tricycle, and rode to the public hospital where Ed had insisted that Agta go. The crowd was large because a competent doctor was in residency that week, and we had an extra wait when the entire staff went on coffee break.

The doctor was a tall, rotund man with a very straightforward style that still managed to be caring. He recommended that the baby stay at the hospital. When Sisi hesitated, the doctor told me in English that the baby had pneumonia. I told Sisi that I thought they should stay at the hospital, and she understood and agreed.

The mother and her infant were checked into a sour-smelling, crowded room of five beds with torn sheets and paint peeling from the walls. An old blind woman sat on a bed in the far corner, where her skinny, wrinkled

husband held her hand. Opposite her was an infant hooked up to an IV and its mother. In the bed next to Sisi's was a large family of Agta, who Sisi greeted, relieved to see familiar faces. They had just checked in with their four-year-old daughter who also had pneumonia.

Sisi's baby was discharged after one night. I took Sisi with me to the city hall and waited while Ed typed a money order to pay for the prescription. The ladies at the cashier's office fawned over the infant.

"A boy? Aw, you're teaching him young to beg for money," they giggled. We took the cash and walked to the pharmacy to purchase the antibiotics, and I gave the mother and her baby tricycle fare for the return home.

By then it was lunchtime again, and I brought the other Agta family some food and convinced the teenage mother, who looked to be about twelve, that her four-year-old daughter had to keep her IV in her arm even though it hurt. I had left and was about half a block away from the depressing, one-story stucco hospital when a young Agta girl came running after me.

"The doctor wants to see you," she panted, so I returned.

"Do you know this young man?" the doctor asked. The man was tall and slender, young, with skin that was dark even for an Agta. I recognized Nene, Rudy's brother.

"He has tuberculosis," the doctor said. "He needs to take his medicine for six months. We have no field workers. You have to be our point person on this." I told the doctor I would do my best, but Nene wasn't even living in Santa Clara. I decided to tell all the other Agta in the area that he would die if he didn't take his medicine. It was essentially true.

On Thursday, it was market day at the Centro; I threw my big bag on top of a tricycle that was about to leave and jumped inside just as a young woman I had befriended on Palaui Island back in February approached the vehicle.

"So, you're going to Santa Clara now? Why? Why don't you come to Palaui anymore?" She looked like she was going to cry, and I explained matter-of-factly that the Agta language was still being used in Santa Clara, drawing the implicit comparison with Palaui, where the language was dying. The tricycle pulled away and the woman stood silently and sadly watching me go.

I got to Santa Clara in the cool hours of the morning and found that the Agta had framed out a new house for me. By the time I set my backpack on the ground, boiled water, and drank a cup of instant coffee, Gregory appeared carrying the green trunk of a bamboo tree, the support for my roof. He strapped it to the frame with flexible rattan strips, laid a few wooden boards for a raised floor, and my house was finished. The floor was five feet by six, and my yellow-green tarp roof covered that as well as

the bamboo table and bench still standing from the previous month's meeting.

I swung my backpack onto the floor and was unpacking my tape recorder, laptop, and writing pad when a group of Ilokano men entered the camp. They came directly to my house and, without an invitation or even a word to me, sat down on my bench. It's hard to keep people out when your house has no walls.

I knew that Ilokano men came by the camp frequently. Most of their business was shady—small-time illegal logging and fishing using electricity. They took the resources from the land and the river and soon there would be none left for the Agta. But the four Ilokanos on that particular morning were looking for a different resource. The men carried axes, picks, and a long-handled metal detector. As they talked to each other I could see greed in their eyes and hear a religious fervor in their voices. They believed that there was buried treasure nearby.

There is a legend that General Yamashita, the commander of the Japanese forces in the Philippines in the final days of World War II, buried tons of looted gold in locations scattered throughout Luzon Island. Everybody in the Philippines knew that General Yamashita, whose last stand was in the same Cagayan Valley where we now sat, killed the troops who buried the gold so they couldn't reveal its location, and then, unfortunately for Yamashita, he died before he could dig up his hidden fortune. In 1970 a farmer unearthed a one-ton golden Buddha on his property. A short while later, the dictator Ferdinand Marcos' federal troops confiscated the Buddha in an early-morning raid, and the farmer was jailed and later disappeared. The golden Buddha was never seen again, nor was the rest of Yamashita's buried gold. You can ask almost anyone in the streets of Manila or Santa Ana and be told that the Marcos clan, who hold several offices in the current government, still have the statue and whoever digs up the remaining hidden treasure, now that the dictator is gone, will be fabulously wealthy.

One man, tall, skinny, in his mid-forties, was less secretive about his pursuits than the other gold-seekers. "George Marius, Treasure Hunter," he printed on a piece of paper the size of a business card, along with his temporary Santa Ana address, and thrust it into my closed hand. The Treasure Hunter asked, his teeth showing, "Will you marry me? Just to get into the United States. I'll pay you. Make it worth your while." I laughed, and so did he, without mirth.

The men decided to leave and as they drifted away into the jungle, Gregory made two announcements. He had a deal with Dalang. Gregory would work for me during the day and Dalang would work in the evenings, and they would split the pay. A reasonable deal for them, but nobody had consulted me. The second announcement was that we would have a family

picnic. I didn't understand until later the purpose for this, and the danger the Ilokano men posed to me.

We had a few minutes and I decided to test Dalang on some definitions in my dictionary. I asked Agta words to see what he would give for the Ilokano; I knew that most of the dictionary was correct. I read, "*Magtaragipo*." My dictionary said "drizzle – light rain."

Dalang said, "Let's go now," perhaps anticipating the picnic. This would not work. Fortunately, he was bad at making up definitions when he didn't know the answer.

As we prepared to leave on the picnic I wondered if hunter-gatherer societies such as the Agta had been doing this same ritual for millennia. Then I learned a lesson. If your house has no walls, and there are Ilokano men hanging around, you carry your computer, audio recorder, camcorder, microphone and all other equipment when you go on a picnic.

As I was stuffing my things in my backpack Gregory told me, "You should take all your clothes. Someone might steal them." We brought pots, cups, rice, and coffee, all the excited kids screaming with delight and racing every which way, and the dogs obediently following with their mouths open with tongues hanging out, but decided at the last minute to leave the cats. They could fend for themselves.

Our noisy troop moved along the river on a path that had been cleared over the ages by walkers and the occasional logging truck or hardy motorcycle. We crossed the river once, then twice, and the dogs spied several ponderous water buffalo cooling in the river from the mid-morning heat and chased them up the opposite bank, the buffalos' hooves sliding in the mud, and into a clearing on the opposite side of the ravine. The dogs were having fun now, too.

We paused under a tall shade tree, and when Gregory, who had lagged behind, caught up to us, he announced that this was where we would set up camp. The rocks and ground were covered with ants, but everywhere seemed to be the same, so I finally gave up trying to find an ant-free zone and took off my boots and socks, which were soaking wet after all the river crossings, sat down in the ant farm, and relaxed. Gregory and the other men grabbed their bows and arrows and hand-carved plastic goggles and went fishing. The kids stripped down to their underwear and jumped into the river. They splashed, dove, and shouted, occasionally stopping to turn over rocks to look for shrimp, but their hunting was rewarded with only a single crustacean that was lost again in the subsequent merry-making.

The men returned shortly with fish. This I figured was the point of such trips. The men could spend more time with their families, rather than the usual pattern of walking a long distance, fishing for several hours, and arriving home much later in the day.

After lunch Gregory said to me, "Look, I'm going to make fire without

a lighter. You can take pictures of the original Agta match.” He worked with a piece of rattan about as thick as a quarter, and sliced it in half on one side, so that he had what amounted to a pair of rattan tongs, into the mouth of which he wedged a small rock to keep them open. He placed this over some wood shavings. Then, steadying the tongs with his feet, he rubbed a long thin rattan strip back and forth along the tongs until the shavings underneath began to smoke. He got down on his hands and knees and carefully blew on his precious package of smoldering shavings until they began to flame and he quickly piled kindling on top. The two twelve-year-old Agta boys with us were both fascinated and amused. One said, “Is that how you used to do it, Uncle?” while the other pre-teen flicked his lighter and smirked.

We moved our camp upstream another hundred yards into an area with more trees, and Gregory indicated that we could do some linguistic work. Sisi announced she would like to go fishing, and Gregory was left to watch the sleeping baby.

“How many siblings do you have, sister?” he asked.

“Just me and my brother.” He was amazed. “Many American families are like mine. If we only want two children, we only have two.”

“Then you must take something to stop the births.” I told him that we did, and he mused that he and Sisi might like to have that. “Eight children is enough.”

“But you only have four,” I pointed out.

“No, eight,” he corrected me. “Two that died from my first wife.” His voice quavered slightly. “She died, too. Sisi’s first two that died, and now the four that are still living.”

Tom Headland, the missionary anthropologist I met in Manila, had decades of demographic data on the Casiguran Agta people, and he calculated that 50% of Agta children die by the age of ten. Gregory’s case was decidedly average, but that didn’t make me feel any less sorry for his loss, and although time had dulled his pain, it was clear that this was a difficult topic for him.

The baby started to howl. Gregory brushed an ugly red ant off the infant’s arm. The bite mark was already inflamed. He waited for Sisi’s head to come above the water and shouted for her to return. She had undoubtedly been a good fisher before her children were born, and many of the other women without children were good at fishing, too, but Sisi’s career would have to wait until she had no more crying infants. That could be a long time.

We packed the gear and returned to the Agta camp, tired and happy, with rays from the late afternoon sun slanting through the trees.

We were still eating breakfast when the Treasure Hunter arrived with a young man trailing him. “I made this trip up here just to meet you,” he

gushed. The man proudly explained that his tall, lean, clean-cut and not unattractive nephew had just graduated from the naval academy. "He's twenty-two years old."

"How old are you?" the nephew asked.

"Twenty-six."

"Wow, you don't look old." He asked about my work and America and my equipment. He told me that Americans were rich, and poor people were lazy. I wasn't interested, and tried to put him off. He got out his cell phone.

"Give me your number." There was a good chance he would dial my number right there to see if it worked, so I gave it to him. I knew it was a mistake as soon as I did it.

"Let's go to the waterfall here in town. We can go with Gregory tomorrow," he suggested, knowing an unescorted trip was impossible. I told him we had lots of work to do and that as soon as the weather improved, we were going on another trip down the coast, but he insisted.

"He wants to know if we can go to the waterfall tomorrow," I told Gregory in Ilokano while the young man listened, and Sisi responded in Agta, "Tell him you're busy. Tell him you're going fishing." I told Gregory in Agta that I agreed with Sisi, so Gregory said in Ilokano, "Sorry, man, I've got to go fishing all day tomorrow."

It was the first credible excuse I had ever heard him make, and the Treasure Hunter left with his nephew. I got several text messages from the aspiring gold-digger over the next few hours, and I texted, "I'm not interested."

When I awoke in the morning in my open bamboo Agta hut, I checked my phone and found 17 text messages from the young naval officer, so I blocked his number. We called Ed, and he agreed that Gregory and I would come to town the next day and the three of us would hire a boat very early the following morning to sail down the coast to interview more Agta.

We gave Sisi a brief lesson on Gregory's cell phone. He would leave it with her while we were gone. She listened carefully, laughing, but refused to try it. Gregory and I had just begun to do some revisions on my Agta dictionary when the Treasure Hunter's nephew reappeared, headphones in his ears, swaying to the music of a machine hidden in his pocket and trailed by a bored-looking friend with music of his own playing.

"This is my cousin," he announced. They brought me a gift of a plastic bag full of sweet rice cakes and looked dismayed when I gave them away to the children.

"I couldn't get through to you on your cell phone."

"The signal's not good here," I lied.

"I'm going to Manila for two months of training. I leave tomorrow. Can I call you when I'm there?"

"Well, we're going down the coast, leaving tomorrow, and there's no

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

signal.” I gestured toward the mountains and the long coast hidden behind them.

“How long will you be there, several months?”

“Oh yes.” We would probably only be there a few days. He chatted meaninglessly.

Gregory deserted me to play the guitar with some other Agta in the next hut. Finally the cousin butted in, “Dude, let’s go to the bar.”

The nephew protested, “No, it’s still early, let’s wait here until it gets late,” but eventually the lure of the bar won, and Gregory and I were left with only an hour of daylight to work.

20 GHOSTS AND SPIDERS

In the early-morning darkness, I set off with Ed, Gregory, and two boat drivers down the coast in rough seas. Sisi, mastering the technology quickly, had phoned five times the previous day warning of a sudden, heavy thundershower, but now the sky was clear. I sought refuge from motion sickness in sleep and awoke when I felt the boat make an abrupt U-turn.

“We need a spark plug,” the driver shouted above the wind. We headed to the nearest coastal community likely to have one, but it didn’t. We continued on our backup engine, reaching Bolos Point, or large Bolos, the more southern of the two towns called Bolos on this coast. Gregory had told me that *bolos* meant “river.” Even though Joe McAlpin had told me back in Hawai‘i not to work in Bolos Point, I decided that I needed to record the Agta spoken there. Besides, Joe wasn’t my thesis advisor or my boss. It was late in the afternoon and I was light-headed from motion sickness and hunger. We skimmed over the shallow reef as the setting sun broke through the clouds, casting golden light on the sand and the green hills. I jumped onto the beach as soon as the boat thudded aground and felt like an explorer in a Hollywood movie who kisses the sand when he reaches dry land after months at sea. Magellan himself could not have been happier when his ships first landed on the Philippine Islands.

We set off along a trail. “So, it’s your brother-in-law’s house?” I asked, wondering whether it was his wife’s brother or sister’s husband.

Gregory looked puzzled. “Yeah, it’s my sister.” I wondered why he hadn’t just told me it was his sister’s house, and he, I am sure, thought I had learned the word for brother-in-law wrong. We marched in silence a long way inland before we saw first one, then a second dilapidated, two-story stone house emerge from the forest. Their window frames had rotted, leaving gaping holes in the walls, and their tin roofs had rusted so badly that they had openings large enough to drop oranges through.

“Oh, it’s Gregory!” screamed a woman with curly gray hair and an unflattering dress that made her look like an old missionary wife. It was Misteen, his sister, and she came running out of the second house in tears. She was still weeping silently when she led Gregory, Ed and me through her front door.

The floor was dirt, and there was a mud puddle in the corner from a hole in the roof. On the far side of the room was the cooking area, an ash pit surrounded by blackened rocks. A pair of wooden stairs led to the sparse second story. There were no chairs or tables, just two tiny rooms flanking the staircase and a wooden bookshelf in a corner stacked with mildewed books and clothes.

We set down our belongings and stepped outside, where Gregory’s nephew, a barefoot Agta man in his early twenties wearing blue basketball shorts and a small gold-colored chain with a cross on his muscular bare chest, led us through the town—a health clinic, a daycare center, a barangay hall, some insubstantial houses, and a concrete basketball court with battered backboards—to a nearby river, where we washed ourselves. As he waited for us, he self-consciously held a hand over his left eye, red from some untreated problem.

In the evening, I sat in a hard chair talking with Taniel, the brother-in-law, who sat cross-legged on the floor. He was the first Agta to ask me directly what I was doing there. The small man had a slightly hunched back, and with the large fanny pack he wore around his waist for betel nut and his long, curly hair, he reminded me of an aging Jewish dad, only with much darker skin and a wandering eye that would have been corrected by a doctor if he lived in America.

“The Nickells came years ago. I helped them organize all the Agta. All the Agta here lived around this house. The Nickells helped us with medicine and taught people to read, and taught them the word of God. When they left, the Agta all went their own way.”

Always the researcher, I asked, “How many Dupanangan Agta do you think there are? Joe McAlpin told me a thousand.”

He thought. “Much more. Probably ten thousand. We did a survey of the Agta from Balicob to Baggao and found 2,200 families. That includes some Labin Agta. But a lot of them are Dupanangan, and that is just one small part of the Dupanangan area.” He went to a bookshelf, extracted a folded piece of heavy paper from the middle of a stack, and opened a map.

“Here, along the coast, thirty families.” He continued like that, pointing at marks representing Agta camps with the family names and numbers.

That night, I placed my sleeping bag on a straw mat Gregory’s sister set out for me on the hard ground outside the house and watched thousands of brilliant white stars in the gigantic sky, far more than I had ever seen in America. When I hung my mosquito net around my jungle bed and drifted

to sleep, I thought I could still feel the rocking of the ocean waves.

In the cool morning, I sat with Taniel and his wife on their dilapidated front porch. Two Ilokano women balancing wicker baskets of yams on their heads came by.

“Who’s that?” they asked.

Taniel said, “This is our daughter, she came to visit her parents because she missed us. Adopted, of course.” The women were skeptical, but when I greeted them in Ilokano, they welcomed me as Taniel’s daughter and continued on their business. Taniel and I were delighted by his joke.

I asked him the local Agta word for house: *bilay*. The word is similar to Ilokano *balay*, and not too different from Tagalog *bahay*, both of which also mean house. The word *balay* is believed to have meant “village meeting house” in the ancestral Austronesian language spoken 4,500 years ago in the northern Philippines. Austronesian languages eventually spread from the Philippines to Indonesia, Malaysia, and throughout the Pacific, and the word *balay* is even found (in an almost unrecognizable form) in the Hawaiian word *hale* (pronounced hah-lay), which also means house.

A child appeared, followed by a line of Agta, including an old man wearing a loincloth and carrying a bow and arrow, his betel-nut chewing pack wrapped around his waist. He reminded me of the grandfather in the Boondocks cartoon I used to read on Sunday mornings when I lived in a place with newspapers. He was tall, with gray hair and faded skin, but his chest and legs were muscular. Even though this man could remember World War II, he looked like he could still fire an arrow with skill.

After Taniel introduced me, I asked him in Agta, “Grandfather, what is the name of this arrow that you are carrying? I have never seen it before.” He held out the *ginilat* arrow in his hands for me to admire. It had a long, sharp metal blade and six rows of curved spikes that ensured that once a pig had been shot, the arrow was not coming loose. I asked the old man the words for head, eye, nose, and ear.

After lunch, someone suggested coconuts.

“You climb the coconut tree,” Taniel teased Gregory, who emphatically declined, looking at the smooth straight trunk extending upward to the sky, where no visible fruit hung, some fifty feet above our heads. At last Taniel’s son, volunteered. As he used his hands and bare feet to pull himself up the lone tree that stood between the two stone houses, I could see that footholds had been notched in the trunk over the years, and the man easily reached the top and proclaimed that there was indeed ripe fruit. He twisted the coconuts from their branches and let them drop to the ground like cannon balls at great hazard to the neighborhood dogs, who yapped when the coconuts landed but were otherwise oblivious.

In the late afternoon, we sat on the second-floor porch of Taniel’s house. The wooden structure tilted so far to one side that it seemed it

would fall at the slightest wind, but I settled in and watched the plains of rice fields, the two grass huts and one stone house of the closest neighbors, and in the distance, a thick grove of trees that hid a crocodile-infested river. Gregory chewed betel nut and spit the excess juices through the holes in the floorboards of the makeshift porch that would have been considered a safety hazard in America—just a few wooden planks laid across some boards, with no nails and no railings. Ed was asleep downstairs in a hammock stretched from the rickety house to a banana tree.

“Do you want to try betel nut?” Gregory asked. I told him I did. He chopped up a small piece of betel nut and wrapped it in the *gimad* leaf and told me, “Don’t swallow. Make sure to spit out the juice.”

“It tastes like a leaf.”

“Here’s some lime. Not too much.” I poured a tiny bit of the white powder into the palm of my hand. I licked my finger, dipped it in the lime, and tried it. It still tasted like leaf. Gregory tore off a tiny piece of tobacco leaf for me. I chewed the ingredients, then spit through an opening in the floor. My spit was a familiar shade of deep red so it had to be right, but it still tasted like leaf.

“Do you feel dizzy?” The Ilokano word *naulaw* covered dizzy, nauseous, and, apparently, high. “A lot of people get dizzy the first time they chew. After you chew many times, you don’t anymore.” Gregory’s sister came up the stairs to announce that the women from the other Agta camp had come to finish the interview, and I went downstairs, stoned, to entertain my guests.

There were a dozen women and twice as many children, and I didn’t know even one of them. I retreated back upstairs, suddenly very nervous, to get some coffee. I found Gregory still chewing betel on the porch. “Come downstairs with me, there’s a ton of people there I don’t know, and I’m shy.”

“I’m shy too,” he stated placidly and didn’t move.

“Yeah, but I pay you to be my companion.” A few minutes later, he appeared downstairs and adopted his new favorite role as my official photographer. After the guests had drunk coffee and chatted for a while, everyone migrated outside to escape the heat.

I sat in the grass, leaning against the stone house, and Taniel began the introductions: “This is Laura Robinson; she is a student. She is studying Agta language, but she lives in Santa Ana, so she came here to see what pure Agta is like.”

I was glad that he was no longer claiming I was a missionary. His introduction was accurate, except for his Agta being superior to all others. The truth is almost everybody in the world believes that their dialect is superior. Of course, there was some truth in what he said, even if he got it backward. Gregory had told me a few days earlier that it was good I had

come to Santa Ana because the Agta dialect where Taniel lived had mixed with too much of the Pahanan language. Mixing and borrowing are found wherever speakers of one language live side by side with speakers of another, but I needed to separate the two for my research.

After dinner, we sat on the porch drinking beer. Gregory played Taniel's church guitar beautifully and softly sang an Ilokano favorite, "Hello Textmate," about lovers who meet by cell phone. Taniel silently read his Bible in the living room and I went to bed.

The next morning as we headed north along the coast, I realized that our small overloaded boat, sailing on the fringe of the Pacific Ocean with no life jackets, was exactly what my tourist guidebook had warned me against. There was me, Ed, Gregory, Taniel, Gregory's sister Misteen, their grandson who called his grandparents mom and dad, an orphan who said he was fifteen but looked to be no more than ten, Gregory's twenty-year-old nephew, a local couple hitching a ride to find their son who had left to look for a bride but not returned, our driver, and Dipog ("Ash"), a puppy Gregory had recently adopted. I tried to imagine the headline in the Manila newspapers when we were lost at sea:

Ferryboat sinks off coast of Philippines, thirty people dead

No, the papers never got the details right.

American anthropologist found dead, valiant puppy swims to safety

Our first stop, on a sandy beach only twenty minutes away, was not soon enough for the vomiting little dog. The Agta woman at the sari-sari store in a coconut grove just behind the beach told me it was a long way to the camp. I had waded ashore without footwear or water, but there was a wide path that made the walking easy, and two kilometers later, we found a group of thatch huts near a rapidly flowing river. The camp was deserted, so we sat down in the shade of palm trees to wait. The women located a round plastic drum with a hole cut in the top, filled it with water from the river, and drank greedily.

I asked Taniel to boil some water for me. He had worked with enough crazy white people to know we were afraid of water, and complied. A few minutes later six women, four men and dozens of children appeared. Just like on our last stop, there was one very old man wearing a traditional loincloth, bringing the total number of such people I had seen in the Philippines to three.

Taniel introduced me as a "student of Bion Griffin's." The crowd nodded approvingly. Bion was the anthropology professor from the University of Hawai'i I had met at the Manila conference. I had adopted him onto my dissertation committee, even though he wasn't a linguist, because of his work with the Agta.

Taniel continued his introduction. "Because Bion's an old man, he sent Laura here to continue his work." I thought about correcting him, but let it

go. After coffee I got out my microphone and notebook I had not left behind, unlike the less essential water and shoes. I had learned something since my first Agta interview, to which I had forgotten to bring a notebook. I began, “I am Laura Robinson. What are your names?”

As we returned along the dirt path to the beach, pushing aside the leaves and vines of the jungle, Taniel’s wife Misteen coughed repeatedly. She looked exhausted. The tiny grandson, struggling to keep up, was also coughing violently. He reached up his arms and cried out.

“Don’t ask *inang* to carry you. I will,” Taniel said. This couple, unusual among Agta, had only two children of their own, but their daughter had died. I had asked Taniel what happened when he showed me a picture of a happy, healthy fourteen-year-old.



FIGURE 8 WORKING WITH AGTA SPEAKERS IN ISABELA PROVINCE

“I don’t know,” he’d said. “Maybe TB. We didn’t have the clinic back then.” The couple had adopted their first grandchild because one child just wasn’t enough, and now, as we walked in the intense midday sun, the grandfather swung the coughing toddler onto his shoulder and marched ahead. Taniel had shown me a book, translated into Agta by the SIL, with a drawing of a man coughing into leaves instead of on the ground, and then burning the leaves on a fire. He had told me, “Yeah, but we didn’t do that, and I never got Misteen’s TB.”

I sat on a small wooden bench on our boat, just wide enough for Ed and me, and watched the land disappear and then the rolling green sea with whitecaps surround us on all sides. The sky was lined with white, streaky clouds.

Taniel shouted in my ear over the roar of the engine. “See that over there? That’s Malibu.” I could almost hear Bion Griffin’s voice. He and I had stood over a map in a Honolulu conference room that overlooked Waikiki beach. He scratched out a name printed on the map and wrote “Malibu,” saying, “That’s what the Agta call it.”

Instead of bothering with the long government process to claim land for the Agta—the process Ed and I had just started in Santa Ana—Bion had simply bought Malibu and given it to the Agta who lived there. I hadn’t been very interested at the time, knowing I would work further north, but now, when I heard the name of the famous Southern California beach, I knew I was in Bion’s territory.

A swift-moving river flowed into Malibu Bay, and Taniel told the drivers to head straight for it. They looked skeptical. The eager orphan spoke up, reassuring them that the river was deep. I could see that Ed, with two young girls of his own at home, enjoyed the boy’s companionship.

“How deep?” Ed asked. “Up to your knees?”

Higher, the boy assured him.

“Your chest?” Higher.

“My chest?” Ed indicated, incredulous. Higher. Ed held his hand above his head and the boy nodded. The boat turned around until it found a good position, gunned the engine and made straight for the white water where the river met the ocean. Half a dozen Agta men and women, standing on the left bank of the river about twenty yards upstream, watched our approach. One of the men wore a traditional loincloth. The boat jumped over the waves and into the river that turned out to be even deeper than the boy had indicated. We landed on the rocky bank and threw our gear on shore, and within half an hour, rice had been cooked and everyone was eating. I searched for the man in the loincloth. He had mysteriously vanished and become an ordinary-looking man in a logo T-shirt. I wondered how many other men hid their traditional loincloths under T-shirts or shorts when the white linguist came to visit.

After we ate, Taniel introduced me, and again said I was taking over Bion’s old job. I corrected him this time. A middle-aged woman offered to do the interview with me, and I thought she look familiar.

“This is one of Bion’s,” Taniel told me, then used the English phrase “woman hunter.” I realized I had seen her photograph. Bion and his wife Annie had made these Agta famous among anthropologists. Annie called her chapter “Woman the Hunter,” and many people thought she’d made it up. But here I was sitting with the woman herself. I asked about the

hunting—and, of course, the language. As we talked, Gregory mumbled a flimsy excuse about keeping the boatman company, slipped away across the beach, and climbed into the boat to lie down where he couldn't be seen from land.

Before we left Santa Ana, Gregory had listed the places with Agta: “Bolos, Dianggo, Malibu—but you don't want to go there, the people aren't friendly.” I insisted that I did want to go there, saying that that was where my teacher worked. I spoke confidently, but I actually was concerned for my safety after reading too many newspaper reports of Americans who vanished in the remote tropics.

“If you go, I'll stay in the boat,” he'd said, almost as a threat, and that's exactly what he did.

We were offered a hut near the back of the small seven-hut camp enclosed by dense forest on three sides and the river on the fourth. The forest had been partially cleared to make way for rice plants, but large shade trees still remained, and the green rice shoots stood waist high. Our borrowed hut had a grass roof and bamboo floors, but looked fairly well constructed. As I put down my backpack, I asked Taniel about Gregory. He speculated that Gregory had heard rumors of supernatural dealings in this place, ghosts of ancestors, but my American mind thought that Gregory's motives might be more earthly, and I wondered if there wasn't some old vendetta against Gregory in this community.

Ed fell asleep in his hammock just after dark, and with Gregory hiding on the boat, it was up to Taniel and me to entertain the curious visitors who had congregated near our temporary dwelling. We served coffee and a crowd gathered around Taniel, whose introductions of me were getting more accurate. When our gin-bottle lantern began to run dry, an old man in a loincloth took a lighter to a chunk of wood that looked more like petrified amber, glassy and yellow. It spit fire like a Fourth of July sparkler, but the flame stayed lit.

“That's an Agta candle,” the old man explained. I pulled out my notebook, carefully stowed in the side pocket of my cargo pants for just such an occasion.

“What's the Agta for that?” Taniel said the word, and like a seasoned linguist's assistant, he repeated, “sah-LANG.” I jotted down the new word, but when I went to enter it into my dictionary, I found it was already there. “Candle,” read the definition, but this sparkling chunk of yellow wood that melted into a black, glassy goo put a whole new perspective on the word.

Taniel wanted to tell me something he struggled to put it into words. “In the understanding of the Agta,” he started, “This *salang* candle wards off ghosts.” He told the other Agta that Americans didn't believe in ghosts. They looked at me in amazement at my incredible belief system. I nodded. Yup, we don't believe in ghosts.

But Taniel wasn't finished explaining bizarre American beliefs. "You know," he struggled to constrain his excitement and laughter, "Americans are afraid of spiders!"

Everyone laughed. Not a subdued polite laughter, but one of utter delight and incredulity. They looked at me again.

"Spiders bite!" I offered in defense of my countrymen.

Taniel went on, "Yes, that's what the last American anthropologist traveling through here said. I held spiders in my hands, let them crawl on my arms, but he refused to sleep in an Agta hut if it had spider webs. He had this tarp, it covered him on all sides, and it had a door that zipped up in front. Man, it must have been hot in there!" The Agta laughed again at the crazy American who would zip himself into a tarp because he was afraid of spiders. They approved of my willingness to sleep in an Agta hut.

Taniel continued, "The missionaries showed me a video about what to do in the event of a spider bite." They all laughed again. This Taniel was quite a comedian. The crowd eventually moved away, and we fell asleep in our hut completely exposed to every kind of man-eating insect this country had to offer.

In the total blackness of night, I heard Ed ask Taniel for advice on how to organize the Agta in Santa Ana to apply for government land.

"No, no, no," Taniel whispered. "It doesn't matter if the leader of the group can read and write. You need a leader who is outspoken."

I wriggled around in my sleeping bag until I was facing them. I spoke into the dark, "You know, people are saying that you appointed Landon as leader. You need to hold a real election." Taniel told Ed that they needed to organize the three Agta camps into one group. "It's hard to have meetings if people have to take a whole day off to do it—walk there, have the meeting, and walk back. In the Agta camps I organized, we used to have a bell—you ring the bell, have your meeting, and then everyone goes home. You can still do it with three camps, but it's going to be hard."

Ed said the Agta wouldn't agree. He felt like they didn't really want the land. He had to do all the paperwork himself because none of the Agta could read and write, and some were demanding payment for the time they spent working with Ed on their own land application.

I suggested, "Well, just wait until you get some dedicated people."

"If we wait, the land will be gone."

At breakfast, my eyes drifted to one small boy with emaciated limbs and an overgrown belly. He had a bloody lesion on his head and his hair had matted into dreadlocks. He couldn't have been more than two years old, and I couldn't imagine him living to see next week, let alone his third year, without medical care. I told Taniel the boy could come to town with us in our boat for medical care, but Taniel just shrugged it off, and nobody seemed concerned. When rice was served, the boy ate as much as anyone,

but afterward, when the other children ran around playing with sticks and using round inedible fruits as balls, he couldn't keep up. After falling down, he was made to sit with the mothers and babies. Ed, sitting on the other side of the fire, looked at me and mouthed, "Ringworm?"

I said loudly in English, all in one breath, "Yes, I think so, and I think he'll die if he doesn't see a doctor. Please convince them to come back with us to see a doctor."

Ed tried, but the parents said nothing, so we packed up our gear, leaving an assortment of extra food, and left in our boat. The wind came up so strong that I couldn't tell if it was rain or ocean spray blowing in my face, and then the rain began to pummel us. Between the violent wind and my flimsy jacket, I was shivering in the cold.

Hours later, when the sun had long since set, we chugged into Santa Ana. I asked Gregory if the Agta wanted to try to make it to Santa Clara that night. He told me they did, so we left Ed, declined a cup of coffee from the family of the boat operators, and set off into the darkness. I dropped my things in front of my guesthouse and handed Gregory 850 pesos.

"What's this for?"

"One hundred and fifty pesos per day for five days' work, and one hundred pesos for your tricycle." He couldn't do the math, but he knew it was a lot of money; even some Ilokanos only made 1,000 pesos in a month.

21 BETRAYED

I got a cell phone call from Gregory Sunday evening. He told me it was raining, so he couldn't go fishing to trade for rice. He wanted more money.

"What happened to all the money I gave you?"

"There are a lot of us," he began, and continued with a long and tortuous hard-luck story that seemed extremely unlikely. I told him no.

Over the next few days I entered data on my laptop and went to talk with Ed about Gregory, the Agta, and money. We decided that I should raise Gregory's salary, but not give him any more extras. Taniel, his wife Misteen, and Sisi arrived in town as I was leaving city hall. Taniel asked me to go with him to the SIL headquarters in Bagabag, to which I agreed, but Sisi asked for food. Ed delivered the bad news about no extras to Sisi, and she just nodded her head.

The next morning Taniel and Misteen were at the guesthouse well before our agreed-upon meeting time and we caught the first bus out of Santa Ana.

We pulled down a gravel road in a red, green, and blue tricycle, as gaudy as a carnival poster, belching fumes. We turned away from the manicured lawns and bougainvillea of the SIL headquarters and entered a muddy, rocky road and then a small path in a densely wooded area. A few turkeys scattered, wings flapping madly, and I saw two small concrete blockhouses guarded by fierce, growling dogs.

A black couple in their thirties came out of one of the houses, shushing the dogs and greeting Taniel and Misteen warmly. The couple spoke in Ilokano and called themselves "Atta." They came from another part of Cagayan where the Negritos called themselves Atta, not Agta—a sound

change that is very common, the same as when the Latin word for “eight,” *octo*, became the Italian *otto*. The couple must have been used to white people because they ignored me and carried on their own conversation. It was a good feeling.

“It’s getting late, we better take you to the guest house,” the man said. But when he fired off a quick text message to Joe McAlpin’s wife, she shot one back that I wasn’t welcome there. So we made arrangements for me to sleep in their small living room/kitchen, with plywood walls and floor, and they would sleep in their miniature bedroom. There was no running water, but they had a pump outside the kitchen door and a muddy outhouse twenty feet away. They set up my mosquito net over a bed wedged next to the kitchen table, and after they had established that I was okay despite my lack of religion, I fell into a sound sleep.

In the morning, we slipped into the malaise of people waiting on nothing in particular that was a long way off, my head pounding from a lack of caffeine. I hadn’t even drunk coffee when I first came to the Philippines. I excused myself, wound my way through the sprawling, shaded compound, and found the SIL front office. A tall man with gray eyes barely glanced up from his computer screen.

“Can I help you?”

“Yeah, I’m interested in looking at some books in the library, but I thought I’d check in at the office first,” I tried to sound polite and casual at the same time.

“Well, I hope so,” he said, apparently annoyed that I could even consider going directly to the library. “Where are you from?”

I explained that I was a student with the University of Hawai‘i.

“Masters?”

“No, PhD.” I hoped that was the right answer. I shifted in my uncomfortable metal chair.

“I’ll need to text the librarian to see if she’s there. She’s been sick,” he said sternly, and punched at his cell phone and stared at me while he waited for a response. I tried to make conversation. “Where you from?”

“North Carolina.”

“Isn’t that where SIL teaches linguistics classes?”

“No.”

The librarian was in, and I shuffled out of the office as quickly as I could. The library was smaller than the one in my elementary school. I asked to see the unpublished notes on Dupanangan Agta grammar written jointly by Joe McAlpin and Tom Nickell, the last two missionaries to work with the Dupanangan Agta language. The helpful librarian, who remembered me and recalled that I spoke Tagalog and Ilokano, brought out the grammar and some other works I didn’t even know to ask for.

Speaking Tagalog went a long way in this work, and speaking Ilokano

made me something of a freak. Some white people could speak Agta—missionaries and anthropologists—but none could speak Ilokano. The librarian left me alone; she had spent time with Americans and had presumably come to accept our strange wish for privacy.

I had been in school for twenty out of the previous twenty-one years, and with a pen and a notebook, reading in a quiet library, a kind of peace came over me. The uncertainties of fieldwork and the problems with my informants and creepy Ilokano suitors melted away. I just read and took notes. I went back to the Atta house for lunch and returned to the library, and even during the power failure, as predictable as afternoon follows morning, and as frequent, I switched to a seat by the window and kept reading. Critiquing other people's work was a lot easier than writing my own.

Mentally rejuvenated, I spent the next day doing a little sideline work with some local teenagers. I used to think that certain linguists were crazy—the ones who'd figured out what language was spoken in a town when their bus lurched to a stop for a blown tire, and collected several hundred vocabulary words by the time the wheel was patched. Seven months had transformed me into that person.

Their language, Pahanan, was one of the thousands of endangered languages in the world, and one that was directly relevant to my dissertation. There was a chain of Agta languages spoken from north to south—Dupanangan Agta, Pahanan Agta, and Casiguran Agta. Like Gregory and many other Dupanangan Agta in the northern area who could also speak the more distantly related Labin Agta, Taniel and others in the central area could speak Pahanan. I wanted to find out how much influence Pahanan Agta had on Dupanangan Agta. I guessed that the influence of Pahanan Agta in the south and Labin Agta in the north was the main reason why there were two dialects of Dupanangan Agta.

Several teenage boys were weeding a narrow row of plants that lined the large gated compound. Taniel spoke to them in Pahanan Agta; I caught a few words but mostly couldn't understand, when a large Tagalog woman at the gate interrupted him.

"Today's their work day," she said in a sweet but firm tone. We were standing in the full, hot sun, and she invited us to sit in the shade on a bench just inside the compound walls. The boys dumped out wash buckets by a nearby water pump, and one boy jumped into a large bucket. It looked like fun. The woman began to interrogate me, and I struggled to keep my Tagalog correct and respectful.

"So, you're here to ask our boys about Agta life?"

"No, just language, ma'am."

She looked confused. Taniel explained, "She asks a few words in Ilokano. They give her the words in Agta."

The woman looked more confused. I could tell that our request was unusual, and that was not good. “Well, today is their cleaning day, if you’d have come in the afternoon, they would be playing volleyball. But now they’re cleaning.” She paused, looked me over, and asked, “Are you with SIL?”

“No, ma’am, I’m not. I’m a student.”

“But you’re a Christian?”

“Oh, yes.”

“What denomination?”

“Uh, my denomination doesn’t have a name,” It was quick thinking. Had I heard someone say the same thing at some point on my travels?

“But you believe in Jesus Christ?”

“Oh yes, ma’am,” I said perhaps too loudly, and wondered if there was some secret code or sign that allowed her to detect impostors.

“Well, I’ll have to email our director in *Germany*,” she relished that word, “to see if it would be all right for you to interview our boys. We can contact you at *SIL*?” She had the unpleasant habit of emphasizing the last word of each sentence.

“I’m not with SIL,” I told her for the second time. She showed us the gate.

“That wouldn’t happen if the director was there,” Taniel said by way of apology as we walked back along the gravel road, and I wondered if that were true. A week later, I got an email: “You can come back to interview our boys if you bring a letter of support from the Director of SIL Northern Luzon.” That would be Joe McAlpin, who most likely had composed the email. It was a dead end. I would have to travel out to Palanan Bay on the coast if I wanted to interview speakers of Pahanan Agta.

With nothing left to accomplish on my trip, I plotted my retreat. It was too late for me to make it all the way back to Santa Ana before dark, so I would take the 2 a.m. bus and arrive in Santa Ana in daylight. That was why I was on the main road at 2:30 a.m., tipping a tricycle driver handsomely, and boarded a bus passing by just as I arrived. The passengers were all asleep and the lights were off, but I climbed over several mountains of luggage in the center aisle and settled in a seat in the back. I had just found a semi-comfortable position when the bus jolted to a halt.

“Traffic,” a voice said. Traffic? We were in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night.

“Nothing we can do. Just dig in and try to get some sleep,” the driver announced, and shut off the bus engine. I hadn’t paid my fare yet and the thought flickered through my tired brain that maybe I could escape from this temporary prison and catch another bus. But I was trapped in the back row and all alone on a dark night somewhere in the northern Philippines so I dug into my seat and slept.

When the first rays of the red sun appeared on the horizon, I saw that half the paved road had been dug up by construction workers and hundreds of vehicles were waiting. After workmen removed the barriers and reopened one lane of the main south-to-north highway, it took us four hours to get through the obstruction. It was smooth sailing after that.

We began to roll through a few towns; I was feeling groggy but couldn't sleep. I got a text message: *What is your location?* I figured it was the Atta couple from Bagabag checking to make sure I was safe, and I texted back the name of the town. I got an instant reply: *Wen R U coming to Santa Ana?*

"Today. Who is this?"

The Treasure Hunter responded. I didn't want to talk with that guy. My phone rang a minute later. It was Gregory. We hung up and I called him back so he wouldn't waste his phone minutes. When I asked how he was, he replied, "We are here," changing the usual Ilokano or Agta answer into a strange Tagalog greeting.

"Have you seen the Annoying Guy?" I asked in Agta using the name that the Agta had given the Treasure Hunter.

"No. Not in a long time. We are short of rice. When are you coming home?" I told him I would be in Santa Ana that afternoon and would call him the next day. He seemed unhappy.

We said good-bye, and a few minutes later I got a text message from Gregory's phone. "This is Stephen" What followed was either gibberish or I didn't understand his Ilokano. That is always a problem when you are speaking a language you only recently learned. I replied that I didn't understand, and the response came in Tagalog: *Where are you?* I texted back the name of the town.

When I reached Tuguegarao, I decided to stop for breakfast. Outside the bus station, in the teeming street, I got a text message from a phone I didn't recognize, *Laura where is your location?* I replied, *Who is this?* but got no answer.

Then my phone rang. I was wary of the Treasure Hunter and stared at the strange digits until I realized it was my parents' number in California with a lot of ones and zeros before it. My dad said, "We have some very bad news. Your grandmother died last night."

Now both of my grandmothers had died while I was in a country halfway around the world. I slumped down into a corner along the side of a building, but the crowded, filthy, polluted streets of Tuguegarao made my head spin. I couldn't imagine a worse place for mourning my little California grandmother. She was ninety-eight, and I can't say I didn't see it coming, but my grandma was one of the coolest people I knew. She had gone a bit senile by then, and she had absolutely refused to remember anything negative that had ever happened to her. Life was a party to that woman, still drinking and dancing into her nineties. She loved to ask me if I

went dancing, and I didn't have the heart to tell her it wasn't my scene, so I said I did, and she would be so happy and forget all about it and ask me again five minutes later.

My dad said, "I called her last night. The nurse put her on the phone. I asked how she was doing. Her voice was all raspy and I could hardly hear. She said, 'I'm doing fine.'" He paused for a while and we sat together in the silence.

"She died in her sleep a few hours later." I could visualize my dad with thinning gray hair and a furrow in his brow that only appeared when he was talking about bad things, the same crease I'd seen when he asked Gregory to protect his only daughter.

It was early in the morning, my backpack full, and I sat in the thatched-roof cabana outside Bill and Eden's guest house drinking a cup of coffee and peacefully watching people pass by on the unpaved street. I was almost ready to leave for Santa Clara when I got a text message from the Treasure Hunter's phone.

R U coming to Gregory house 2day?

I had talked with Ed, who'd told me that he thought the Treasure Hunter was dangerous. I was worried. I didn't answer. Another text came a few minutes later.

What time R U coming here 2day?

Then it hit me hard. I didn't want to believe it, but only way he could have known that I was going to Santa Clara that day was if Gregory had told him. No one else knew. Gregory had lied, and I had believed him. The Treasure Hunter was there, waiting for me. Gregory was supposed to be my protector, but he was planning to escort me into the hands of a potentially dangerous man.

I was very nervous and confused. I found Bill in the open kitchen drinking black coffee from his favorite mug, and I asked his advice.

"This guy sounds crazy; I wouldn't go up to Santa Clara if I was you. Did you tell Ed?"

Ed was smart and sensible. He was the person in the city government who knew how to solve difficult problems, and I had a big one now. I crossed the patchwork grass-and-dirt field in front of the crumbling gymnasium that passed for the town civic center and found Ed at his desk in his office on the second floor. We walked out onto the balcony, and I could see the China Sea lapping in the distance, its waves sparkling in the sun, as I confided what had happened over the few weeks since I met the Treasure Hunter. I was worried and began to lose my confidence in my ability to speak Tagalog or Ilokano and was grateful that Ed spoke good

English.

He was deeply concerned, and said “You shouldn’t go into the mountains anymore. Just have the Agta come here and work for you in town.”

“That’s a crappy solution,” I complained more to myself than to Ed. “How am I supposed to get better at speaking Agta while I’m living in town?” But both of us knew he was right.

Then we saw Gregory and Landon across the street, and my heart stopped. Ed motioned for them to come to his office, stuck a piece of paper into the typewriter, and as they filed into the office and waited silently, typed an assistance form for cash that would buy them each half a sack of rice. They got their money and Ed followed them out, and I trailed silently behind, unsure of what else to do.

In the street, Ed conferred with a tall, heavyset man who looked familiar. The two wore serious expressions and leaned in close so that no one could overhear their conversation. The man walked away and Ed pulled me aside. “That’s a barangay captain. He says he knows this Treasure Hunter, but not by the name he told you. He’s a bad guy. The captain will keep an eye on him.”

Ed started his motorcycle, and I went to jump on the back, but some other opportunistic passenger got there first. “I’ll see you over at the market!” Ed shouted as they sped off, and I jogged across the street to catch up with Gregory and Landon, who had already started walking.

Landon asked, “*Magudek ka yein?*” *Are you going upstream today?*

“No.” I answered without explanation, and I thought I caught a sigh of relief coming from Gregory. We walked in silence to the market. Landon and Ed, who was waiting for us, went to sort out the business with the rice. Gregory and I squatted in the shade in the back of the market where the tricycles for hire were parked. I checked the time on my cell phone. It was just a nervous impulse. The time was meaningless.

“Did you get a new phone?” He was impressed.

“No, I just got a new case for it.” We stared at the sand.

“Are you still scared?” Gregory asked.

“Yes.” We stared silently in opposite directions for a full minute until the words came out fast: “I’m not going up to Santa Clara, but if you don’t go home right now, you could work for me here in town today and go back later this afternoon, then come down again tomorrow or whenever is good for you.”

“Well,” he considered aloud, “I’ve got some work to do this afternoon and tomorrow. How about Saturday?”

I agreed, even though that would leave me with a few days sitting in front of my computer when I ought to be recording Agta speakers. Ed and Landon returned with the bag of rice, and I waited with Ed while the two

Agta men went to find tobacco. Ed chatted with a wrinkled old lady about the price of piglets, but when she drifted away and we were alone in the small, bustling Santa Ana market, Ed spoke quietly, "I don't want to alarm you, but I think this guy wants to kidnap you."

"I know!" I shouted, simultaneously relieved that Ed was taking the threat seriously and horrified that this guy might be trying to kidnap me.. Within a minute, Ed disappeared, and I walked by myself to my guesthouse only to find Gregory and Landon and several other Agta hanging out in front.

"We were wondering if you could charge my cell phone," Gregory asked meekly. I was angry. He could hang out at my house to get the phone charged, but not to work for me? My anger built until it became a very still coldness in my face and neck and chest. My head was spinning, but I just said, "Charging takes a long time."

Before the Agta left, Gregory announced that he wouldn't come to work with me on Saturday after all, but he would see me the following Thursday. There would be a general meeting in Santa Ana of all the local Agta.

22 I FLEE SOUTH

I spent a sleepless night twisting in my bed, my mind racing, wondering what would stop a crazy and violent Treasure Hunter armed with a gun and the knowledge of where I lived and what room I slept in—information that my confidant and “friend” Gregory could provide him—from slitting the screen in the middle of the night and making me just another number in a very long line of Philippine kidnapping victims.

At a sharp rap at the window, I startled wide awake and frightened in the bright blue light of morning. I didn’t move, pretended I was asleep. But was that worse than bolting out my door, screaming for help and rushing to Bill’s house before the Treasure Hunter could jump into my room with a gun and maybe shoot me? I remained still, holding my breath, until I finally saw it was only Eric, the boarding-house manager, small and effeminate, cleaning the windows from the outside.

My heart was pounding. I jumped out of bed, afraid to believe it, but it was still Eric who was now looking at me through the window just a few inches away. It was his normal cleaning morning, and he gave me an embarrassed smile.

Within a few minutes I had gathered my scattered thoughts and calmed my beating heart, and decided to move into the main house with Bill and Eden and the kids and not spend another frightened night in that vulnerable room.

Eden quickly gave her approval and in less than an hour Eric and I had moved my personal belongings and equipment into the big house attic, where a small bed was set up for me. The room was stifling hot, the ceiling was low, and there was no door to keep people out, but anyone wanting to get me would have to sneak past Bill and the gun under his pillow, and I began to relax. I came downstairs and showed Bill the picture of the Treasure Hunter that the man had insisted I take in order to get a look at

my camera, and Bill studied it.

“If I see that guy, I’ll tell him to leave, and if he doesn’t leave, I’ll shoot him.” Although I consider myself a pacifist, the thought was comforting.

At the Internet shop, I emailed Sean, my ex-boyfriend and former Australian Green Beret, and asked for advice. His reply frightened me, all about what I should do before I was kidnapped—and after.

“Don’t keep too many numbers stored on your cell phone. Give all the numbers nicknames so that there will be no way to identify them.” When I told him that Bill had offered to go to Santa Clara and get my solar panels back, Sean had said, “Good. These things should be handled by men with guns and not little girls.”

Although his comment reminded me of all the reasons this man was my ex, there was something very important about what he was saying. Although I was born in a time and place where I could get through a PhD program and never have my professors see me as anything but a bright young student, professors who had blissfully sent me into the field seeing my odyssey as no different from the ones they had all conducted at my age, I had journeyed into a world where being a single female had made me a target. So I took Sean’s offensive words to heart and emailed back my thanks. The next day Taniel arrived at my house. His wife and son did not have TB, and their doctor had prescribed ordinary medicines for their nasty colds. Sitting in the outdoor cabana, I explained why I was not in Santa Clara.

“Did you guys ever meet The Annoying Guy?” I asked, using the Agta nickname for the Treasure Hunter.

Taniel’s wife Misteem laughed uneasily. “He is annoying.”

“Well, I’m scared of him. I don’t want to go up to Santa Clara while he’s there. I told Gregory to come work for me in town, but he doesn’t want to. I think he has some sort of problem.” I tried to be as vague as possible without saying “Your brother-in-law, my informant, is selling me out to a dangerous man!”

“Maybe you could stay here and work for me?”

I knew Taniel could use the cash, but his conscience got in the way. “I better go check on Gregory. Learn what is wrong.” So I was left without an informant for the week.

My research was coming along nicely, but my National Science Foundation fellowship grant said that I should be in the country for another two months. Maybe it was time to call it quits. If I caught a plane to San Francisco, I could make my grandmother’s memorial service.

Back in my attic room I got another text message from the Treasure Hunter: *R U sure U will be at UR boarding house 2day*, and I decided to take one of Sean’s suggestions—a short vacation away from Santa Ana—very seriously. Eden asked Reynalyn, the girl who ran her cell phone/Internet

shop to accompany me.

And so two young women arrived in the dirty, teeming city of Tuguegarao one September morning, and that friendly girl and I entered a bookstore searching for a written guide to help her to study for a civil-service exam.

My phone beeped. I had two missed calls and a text message. The missed calls were from Gregory, and the text message, also from Gregory's phone, said, *We R in town, where R U?* Then the phone began to ring. It blinked, *Gregory! Gregory!* Since Gregory is illiterate, the text message had to come from the Treasure Hunter, and the thought of Gregory and the Treasure Hunter roaming the tiny town of Santa Ana searching for me made me glad as hell I had chosen that day for a road trip.

I held the ringing cell phone in my hand like a lit firecracker about to explode. Reynalyn and a clerk stared at the offending phone.

"It's the Bad Guy," I offered by way of explanation, and although the clerk didn't understand, my new friend smiled sympathetically. I loaned her the money to buy the exam book, and as we left the store the phone rang again. I didn't look.

I suggested we eat lunch at the place that served pseudo-Chinese food and was considered a luxury, and we hailed a tricycle. As we jumped in and raced away, my phone rang yet again. I slid it out of my pocket and checked the screen. Ed!

"Hey, I just saw you walking down the street in front of Candice's grocery store." Ed was in Tuguegarao. Maybe my luck was changing.

"Someone is using Gregory's phone. I think it's the Bad Guy," I told Ed, using the Ilokano term my close friends and I had developed for the Treasure Hunter. Reynalyn and I stood at the cash register at Chow King, and I couldn't concentrate enough to read the menu. I ordered something from the pictures and we sat down at a table.

Ed called again. "I'm at the Hotel Candice. Can you come meet me in the lobby?"

"Sure, in about half an hour after I eat."

"No, come now." He hung up; we got our food to go and hailed another tricycle. Ed wasn't in the lobby of the Candice Hotel, so Reynalyn and I sat on a plush couch to wait, and I picked up a Gideon's Bible from the heavy wooden coffee table. I flipped to the index. *Bible passages to read in times of grief, anger, anxiety...* I knew which one I needed. I flipped to page 1455 for anxiety.

The page was ripped out.

Ed's wife came in holding the hand of her five-year-old daughter, and I

suddenly remembered why Ed was in Tuguegarao: His wife had just had surgery. I tried hard to forget about my own problems and ask her how she was doing.

“We slept here at the hotel last night because after I left the hospital, it was too painful to ride the tricycle with all the bumping around. We’ll go home this afternoon.” She tried to sound upbeat but was clearly tired, and she had to constantly remind her daughter that mommy was not a jungle gym.

I was glad to see Ed come through the door of the small marble lobby with faux 19th century couches. A manic smile spread across Ed’s face as he pulled out his cell phone and started showing me the text messages he had received that morning.

Hi, this is Gregory’s brother-in-law, Daniel, we were just wondering if you knew where Laura was, we are worried about her, and several other variations on that theme. I pointed out that Gregory’s brother-in-law was named Taniel, and even though he was literate he didn’t know how to send a text message. Ed agreed that this was bad.

“I don’t think you should go back to Bill and Eden’s in Santa Ana right now. You can stay with us at our house with my family.”

I reluctantly agreed. Ed told my friend it was all right for her to go home now.

She was anxious to get back. “Bill and Eden told me not to leave Laura alone, but if you’re here, I guess I can go now.” She was genuinely concerned, but everyone in Santa Ana knew Ed was the guy for difficult jobs, so she gave me a hug and said, “Take care of yourself,” and disappeared in a tricycle while I walked with Ed and his family in the opposite direction.

“First we’ll get you a new cell phone number,” Ed said, taking charge.

“But how will I know what this guy is doing if he doesn’t announce his intentions by text message?”

“Well, it’s up to you,” Ed conceded as we entered a MacDo’s. They ordered, and I slumped down in one of the red plastic chairs, frustrated by how powerless I felt. I fidgeted with my cell phone.

“Do you have a picture of this guy with you?” Ed asked.

I had one on my portable USB drive, so I told him I would get it developed at the one-hour photo and bring it back to him. It would give me something to do. I found a little photo shop a few doors down and gave the girl behind the counter my USB key. She seemed to move in slow motion, and I resisted the urge to tell her to hurry up because this was important. She stuck my USB key into her computer and ran a virus-scanning program. She looked at me accusingly when the program turned up 70 viruses.

“They’re really all copies of just one virus,” I explained lamely, but I felt

like I might cry if she told me she wouldn't print the picture. Instead, she carefully deleted all the viruses and I shuddered as I pointed out the close-up photo of the Treasure Hunter for her to print. I slumped down in the plastic chairs to wait, gazing blankly at the vendors selling cell-phone accessories, until I remembered to buy a new SIM card that would give me a new phone number. After an excruciating twenty minutes, I walked out with two 3x5 glossies of the Treasure Hunter and found Ed still at the MacDo's.

Ed examined the photo and said, "I never saw this guy before." He slipped the photo into his backpack. He said they would check out of their hotel, and I went to buy another shirt and a toothbrush.



FIGURE 9 THE PHOTOGRAPH WITH THE TREASURE HUNTER

We stuffed ourselves into a tricycle, and then into a van, and an hour later we were at Ed's place. The floors were concrete, and the walls weren't painted, but the house was large by Philippine standards, and I was glad to be somewhere safe. After receiving seven or eight more calls and text messages from the Treasure Hunter, I shut the phone off.

Ed's youngest daughter, about five, was a cute, stocky little girl. She stood up from the dinner table and announced that she would sing for me.

"I'm a little teapot short and stout. Here is my handle," she placed her hand on her hip, "And here is my spout." She extended her arm. "Tip me

over and pour me out,” which she proceeded to do to herself. Then she repeated her act in two other languages; I’d like to see an American five-year-old do that.

After dinner, I added the new SIM card to my phone to give it a different number, and I sent a text message to my friend Jason, a fellow graduate student, who had also been doing fieldwork in the Philippines. I was paranoid that somehow the Treasure Hunter had access to my phone conversations and messages (how else did he always seem to know where I was going?), so I sent Jason a careful text message: “Things got worse here, and I might be traveling to where you are.”

Jason was in Cebu, a major city in the central Philippines, not too far from the beaches that made the Philippines a tourist destination for Australian surfers and Japanese businessmen, and, incidentally, close to the island beach where the Philippine natives killed Magellan. But that was almost 500 years ago, and maybe I was being too negative. One of Magellan’s men was a linguist of sorts who recorded words spoken on Cebu. Woman: *perampuan*. Cloves: *chiande*. Cinnamon: *marma*. Silver: *pilla*. Gold: *boloan*. Maybe nothing much had changed.

It would be nice to see Jason. A minute later, my phone rang. It wasn’t Jason’s number. Who else could be calling? I stared at the phone for a few seconds, and pressed the button. It was Jason.

“Are you okay? What’s going on? Since your message was cryptic, and it was a new number, I decided to call you from my alternate number.” I explained what had happened in the previous few days.

“Do you have your computer with you?”

“No, I just thought I was leaving for the day. I had to buy underwear, for God’s sake!” I was half shouting into the phone, and Ed shot me a concerned glance. I tried to calm myself.

“No, I only have my USB drive, but all my notebooks are sitting on my desk in Santa Ana.” My voice was getting louder again. “And there are no backups!” I’d been in the Philippines for eight months, and the majority of the research I had conducted was sitting in handwritten notebooks with pictures of cartoon characters on the covers on my desk in a tiny Philippine town that I was afraid to return to. If I had to flee from kidnappers and get dysentery and be treated like a crazy woman, I at least wanted good data to show for it.

Jason said, “I’m not in Cebu now, but I’m going there the day after tomorrow, and I could meet you there.” I wasn’t sure. I just had to get out of Cagayan for a while and think. It’s one thing to risk kidnapping for love or a lot of money, but I was doing thesis research. I promised to call Jason the next day, and pushed the off button.

Ed came back into the kitchen. “Should we call Gregory, he keeps texting me asking about you.”

I told him to do it. Ed sent his daughter out of the room so that she wouldn't accidentally call out my name, and he dialed Gregory's phone. Gregory picked up, and Ed shouted that he should walk to somewhere with better reception. I could picture the Agta man in his hut with his whole family around.

"I haven't seen her." Ed said and paused, "No."

There was a long pause while Gregory spoke. "No, she's not responding to my calls either."

"Have you seen the Treasure Hunter around?"

"So you haven't seen him. Okay, well, I'll let you know if I see her, and I'll see you on Thursday at our meeting."

"Okay, bye." Ed hung up and spoke very slowly and carefully, "He says he hasn't seen the Treasure Hunter for five days. Now you know he's lying."

I felt almost as if I had been punched in the stomach. Gregory, a man I had worked with and helped and trusted, was giving information to a man who wanted to kidnap, maybe rape and kill me. We also knew the Treasure Hunter didn't steal Gregory's phone, because Gregory picked up.

I called home to Bill and Eden's. I told Bill about the phone calls that day and that I was nervous. Bill sounded worried, and he wasn't the kind of guy who showed his emotions or asked a lot of questions.

"Ed called the mayor, and the mayor called the chief of police," I offered.

"Well, that's useless."

"I know, but Ed just went ahead and did it...so.... I'm not coming home tonight," I tried to steady my voice.

"Okay. But you're coming back?"

"Yeah, eventually." I got off the phone.

I borrowed a phone charger, a pair of shorts, and a T-shirt, and headed upstairs where Ed and his wife had generously ceded me their bed. A mosquito net was already set up, and I lay in the dark, listening to the noises of the night. I heard voices outside, and I quickly slid to the window. Just the wind. Back in bed I jumped when I heard a beep. My cell phone had fully charged.

I drifted into a troubled sleep and awoke before dawn from a dream of a forest and darkness and running. I think there were pigs, too, but I couldn't quite remember. There was nothing to do, so I lay in bed and waited for Ed's family to wake up. I planned my escape route, something left over from my college days as a seasonal firefighter in the forests of Northern California. On some fires, I was the only woman on my fire-fighting crew. It was heavy-duty work and extremely difficult, but it paid well. It's a bad idea to go deep into the forest with a shovel and a forty-pound backpack and no way to retreat if the fire suddenly explodes out of control, so we

planned escape routes. I tried to picture the exterior of Ed's house, but I had arrived at night. I knew the area behind his house was undeveloped because I had smelled pigs.

At breakfast I turned on my phone with my old number while I waited for Ed to get ready. I slid in the battery and fitted the case on, and the phone rang. It was Gregory. They must have been calling every few minutes all night. It wasn't even 7 am. I turned the phone off and slid in the SIM card for the new number, my private line with Jason.

It wasn't my style to let myself obsess and worry, so I set my mind to other things. I needed to figure out what to do with my possessions in case I never made it back to Santa Ana. I visualized my room and started to make a list. Things To Give Away, and who to give them to. My water filter would go to Ed, my sleeping bag to Gregory's brother, and my clothes to whichever Agta needed them. Then a list of Things To Send To Me. My notebooks, my microphones. Certain books that couldn't be purchased in the U.S. My computer. The two lists took up a full page.

Ed was finally ready. We stepped outside the house, and I handed him the list, saying, "Here's what to do with my stuff in case I never get back to Santa Ana."

"Thanks," he said after looking it over and seeing I had willed to him two water filters, a Swiss army knife, a quick drying towel, and a stack of blank CDs—although it wasn't exactly a will, because I had no intention of dying.

I told him where to contact me at in Honolulu should I not see him again. He stood on the street level and had me sit on the steps where I wouldn't be visible from the road while we waited for a bus or van to take us to Tuguegarao.

A few minutes later the bus from Santa Ana came into view. I grabbed my bag to go, but Ed said, "Get down there where they can't see you." Ed was right. He had the small-town mentality. If we saw anyone from Santa Ana, everybody in town would know where I was in a matter of hours. Minutes, if my spotter owned a cell phone.

We waited for another vehicle, and soon boarded a van coming from Gonzaga. I climbed in first and Ed sat beside me. "Try not to worry too much. And you should get a haircut. Or a hat." I looked at Ed and laughed.

"The chief of police wants your phone number. Can I give it to him?"

"Yeah, go ahead," I reluctantly agreed. Ed called the police chief, but didn't mention I was sitting next to him. Soon, my phone rang. I didn't recognize the number, but Ed confirmed it was the chief. I answered in Tagalog.

"Is this Laura Robinson?" the deep voice questioned in heavily accented English.

"Yes," I answered in Tagalog. The connection was bad, so I told him in

Tagalog to call me back later. He sounded skeptical, but agreed. Apparently nobody had told him I spoke Tagalog.

Ed's phone rang. He hooked in his headphones and gave me one, and I listened in while he explained to the Santa Ana police chief what he understood of the situation. The chief said he would call me, so we hooked the headphones into my phone, and I gave one to Ed.

"So, what's going on?" the chief asked once he got used to the idea of speaking to me in Tagalog.

"I met this guy in Santa Clara, and now he has been texting me all the time, asking where I am and saying he was going to come to my house," I tried to be brief.

"That doesn't sound serious." He seemed annoyed that the mayor had personally asked him to deal with this trivial matter. "How are we ever supposed to get Americans to come here if you are afraid of things like this?"

"Exactly," I replied. He seemed puzzled, but went on, "Where are you?"

I said the first place that came into my head, "Manila," and Ed smiled and nodded encouragement.

"Well, you should come home to Santa Ana." I said good-bye. I tended to agree with Bill that the police were nearly useless in the Philippines.

When we got to Tuguegarao, Ed said, "Manila, you're in Manila. We probably shouldn't be seen together." He got on the return bus to Santa Ana and called out, "Take care of yourself."

At the bus station, I got an infusion of cash from an ATM. The next bus to Manila wouldn't arrive until midnight so I bought a ticket to Solano, a town I had visited in January on my first journey north to Santa Ana, and got off at dusk at Jollibee with its bee sign.

On one side of my hotel was a beautiful white-tiled pool with five inches of water in the deep end. Its lone resident was a long-legged frog living in an alabaster, escape-proof prison. The hotel had belonged to the former governor of the province, and it looked as though nobody had given it a second thought since he left office a few decades ago. A red Chinese rug butted up against ornate teak Chinese furniture.

A dark-haired, pretty Filipino woman in her twenties behind the front desk spoke English. She gave me a key, and I climbed the red-carpeted staircase to my room. It had beautiful, carved hardwood furniture and Persian carpets and a bed with springs that dug into my back. I showered in near-scalding water. As I lay in bed awake, a crowd downstairs sang karaoke, both Tagalog folk songs and popular American tunes. A young man belted out "A Horse With No Name" in barely recognizable English.

Quit the whining and give the damn horse a name, I thought. I found my earplugs and fell asleep.

When I awoke from my nap, I went outside into the dark street, but the impersonal vibe of the mid-sized city made me feel safer. I ducked into a noisy Internet cafe crowded with thirteen-year-old boys milling about watching each other play video games. I was shown to a computer in the corner by the window. Feeling lonely I sent off emails to my father and to Tom Headland, my SIL missionary friend. I skimmed the rest of my emails, reluctant to write friends for fear of not having anything good to say.

I bought a takeout pizza and devoured it in my room while watching TV news about a Muslim kidnapping gang that worked out of Cebu. I shut off the TV, loaded the new SIM card into my phone and called Jason.

I had met Jason a few years before, when we were new PhD students, both in our mid-20s and from California. Jason was a driven student who took double the normal credit limit, hoping to finish his PhD coursework and get a certificate in French in an impossible three semesters. He had left for the Philippines a year and a half prior, after three semesters, only three credits shy of his certificate in French translation. He couldn't stand being in the university; he had to be out doing fieldwork, and he had traveled two-thirds of the Philippines, conducting one-day interviews with speakers of at least 100 of the country's 170 or so languages.

He picked up the phone right away. "Are you okay? What's going on?"

"Well, it all started about a month ago, I met this Treasure Hunter when I was up at the Agta camp..." my voice was shakier than I had expected. "I just thought he was annoying at the time, but come to think of it, that's when Gregory offered to lend me his gun..."

Jason listened as I talked and talked.

Outside of Cuba, China, and North Korea there weren't many communists left in the world by the year 2006, but Jason was one of them. He assured me the Treasure Hunter was not NPA, and told me his comrades didn't kidnap Americans anymore. I didn't bother to tell him about our night of terror caused by the NPA kidnapping threat in Santa Ana. We talked the thing into pieces, and then fell back into our usual habits of discussing linguistics.

Jason suggested that we do a field trip together to check out some of the Agta south of Santa Ana along the coast. I wanted to see how Jason could really get 1,000 words and 500 sentences in one day from a speaker of a language he didn't know. Most linguists only got a couple hundred words and a handful of sentences, and if the language disappeared, years later that was all that the world would ever know about that particular language. Jason would revolutionize Philippine linguistics with his mountains of data. That was fabulous, but in my temporary paranoia, I wondered if anyone else but him and me cared.

I slept for twelve hours with my phone next to my pillow. I felt a cold coming on and took a long, hot shower, and by the time I got to the front desk, it was past checkout time so I extended for another day. I bought a newspaper from a rack outside a candy store and got some hard one-peso candies for my throat as I read about an oil tanker that sank in a storm and spilled 53,000 gallons of crude on a coral reef a few miles south of the Philippines.

After lunch I stepped out on the street into the pouring rain. The headlights of buses and tricycles bounced off the raindrops, and I flagged down a tricycle for the three-block ride to my hotel. He drove the wrong way.

“No, over there,” I pointed.

“The street is flooded,” he told me, so we took the long way around. The hotel doorman smiled, amazed and amused as I bounded through the lake that had been the street in front of my hotel. I checked my phone and found two texts. One was from Eden asking me to buy her some photograph paper while I was in the city, the other was from Ed.

Treasure Hunter arrested. Moved to a jail in Aparri. Looks like he'll be there for 3 to 5 months for the gun charges alone.

It was great news. By the time he got out of jail, I would be back in Honolulu teaching 18-year-old college freshmen. His text continued: *We had meeting with all the Agta today. They all wonder where you are; I told them I hadn't heard from you. They want you to come home. Do you think you might now?*

I texted that I'd be home tomorrow, feeling as if a backpack weighing a hundred pounds had been lifted from my shoulders. For the first time in a long while, I smiled.

It was nearly dark by the time the bus approached Santa Ana. I got off at the small, dusty grocery store on the side of the highway and as I walked through the gate to my guesthouse, I could just make out the silhouette of Bill sitting in his rocking chair on the porch in the fading light, like a statue of a sentinel.

Eden and the girls and the new maid were instantly upon me, wanting to know where I had been and what I had done.

“You know, they arrested that guy,” the girls gushed triumphantly.

23 WHERE R U?

I spent the next twenty-four hours in bed with a fever and coughing except for dinner and breakfast. Bill didn't speak to me at either. I cancelled a trip to Tuguegarao with Ed and the Agta who were filing their application for land. I was still too sick to do much, and stayed in bed reading a detective novel my parents had sent for my birthday.

I finally emerged from the house on Tuesday and walked down the dusty road toward the ocean. Taniel was in town staying in one of the wooden shacks on the government-owned beach land. I found his wife Misteem, who invited me inside to a tiny, dingy room. I could see the beach through the holes in the wall, and the kitchen sink consisted of a water jug carefully placed on a counter so that the water would run out of the house instead of on the floor.

"We were worried about you," Taniel started in his nasal drone. "We didn't know what happened."

"Well, I'm here, I'm okay," I answered vaguely.

"We had our meeting. Everyone asked about you. Ed said he didn't know where you were."

I changed the subject. "So, do you want to come work for me?"

Taniel agreed, and I left before he could offer me coffee. He said he would come by Bill's place in the morning after breakfast, and I went home to finish my detective novel.

The next morning, still in my pajamas, I had just stumbled down the stairs from my safe room in the main house to the open-air kitchen when Bill looked up from frying his skillet of toast. "Your friend is here."

"He's early," I grumbled. I poured hot water in a cup and mixed in the powered coffee. Bill put a plate of toast and eggs in front of me. I ate, put on some clothes, and wandered over to the cabana.

It would be my first time working with Taniel. We sat in the shade of

the cabana's thatched roof, and I asked Taniel for a group of sentences that Gregory had translated a month before.

He was nervous. I gave him the sentences in Ilokano and he translated them very quickly, much faster than Gregory would have, but his sentences were mostly Ilokano with a few Agta words thrown in.

It was as though after so many years of translating the Bible into Agta, he had to be "perfect." The Bible was the word of God, and since the Bible they knew was the Ilokano one, that was the word of God in much the same way that most American Protestants regard the King James version as definitive. If the Agta word had a slightly different meaning than the Ilokano one, it was better not to translate it.

I decided to try a different approach. "I'll play a bit of a story I recorded, then you repeat it to me in Agta and I'll write it down."

Taniel listened carefully and caught on quickly, and soon I had written down a story about a cruel uncle who tied up his unattractive nephew. The sister found her brother, untied him, and they ran away together. It wasn't until three years later that the siblings found their uncle and cut off his hand. I couldn't help thinking that the Agta lived in a tough world.

Then I got a text message from Ed: *Just saw Treasure Hunter on motorcycle heading to town.*

I texted back, *R U sure?*

Immediately, a text from an unknown number appeared on my phone.

Hi Laura! Where R U?

I didn't need to see Ed's reply. The Treasure Hunter was out of jail.

Ed texted, *Are you at your house? This is big trouble. I'm coming over.* He pulled up on his motorcycle ten minutes later, and after filling Taniel in on what had happened, Ed said, "He probably bribed someone. Probably not very much money, either." Taniel shook his head in agreement.

"What did it cost him, do you think?" I asked. "Maybe 500 pesos?" That was about ten bucks.

Ed didn't disagree, and said, "You should just stay around the house here."

We were done working for the day, so Taniel escorted me to the market, where I checked my email. I walked home with Reynalyn, my friend from the store who had accompanied me to Tuguegarao. In the evening I received a text from Gregory's phone, claiming to be the barangay captain and asking me to come to his house so we could resolve my problems.

The next morning, Taniel told me that the Treasure Hunter had been at his house by the beach that night asking about me. I started to think about leaving again, but I was still coughing and exhausted, and I didn't feel like I could make a good decision. Ed decided to organize a meeting so I could talk with Gregory and Landon, the Agta president.

Gregory brought Sisi and all their children, the orphan, the crazy old

widow, and another couple from Santa Clara. Landon brought his wife and children and two other couples from Limbus, including Gregory's older brother Unday and his wife Nagi, both stumbling drunk. The Agta were assembled in the cabana in Bill and Eden's yard by mid-morning, but Ed was missing and my crew was growing restless. I was hungry and had a headache, but didn't have the food to feed everyone.

I finally went inside, gathered the leftovers after everyone at the house had eaten, and took it out to the Agta, but it wasn't enough. The adults let the children eat.

The cabana was overflowing with people. Gregory's brother was raving and the children were eating and shouting. I was exhausted and feverish and my head ached; I couldn't think, so I stepped back onto the patio.

Gregory came outside and squatted in the sand. I squatted down next to him, but didn't face him. He handed me the cell phone and my solar panels.

"Here are your things. I don't want them anymore. I don't deserve them." He was quiet. "They only caused me trouble."

I silently took my things.

"I didn't know," his voice was choked up. I still didn't look at him. "I didn't know what he said to you in the text messages. That text message was from the real barangay captain. I told him to write it. I wanted to talk it over with you. And the text from Stephen, that was really from Stephen."

I had almost forgotten about that suspicious text.

"I didn't know the Treasure Hunter was calling you. I left my phone to be charged in town. He must have used it then. I just need to feed my family." He broke into sobs. "The fishing isn't good. We have the widow, the two orphans, my brother and my sister, their spouses."

When he finished crying, I got up and walked away. His story didn't fly. It isn't unusual in America in the business or academic worlds for people to betray their friends for their own gain, but it's a different story when that betrayal could lead to my kidnapping, rape, and murder. Gregory had plenty of chances to tell me the truth. We had our own secret language, Dupaningan Agta, which he could have used to warn me even if the Treasure Hunter was standing next to him. He hadn't, and the Treasure Hunter was still hunting me.

Ed pulled up on his little red motorcycle and soon the clamor of screaming children, raving drunks, loud stories, and endless gossip all died down as Ed spoke to them.

"People, Laura is our guest. She has been a great friend to the Agta. She gave Gregory work and she is saving your language and she gave you food. She needs your help. A bad man wants to hurt her. You know what I mean. You have to help her now. Don't let anything bad happen to her while she is our guest in Cagayan. She can't go into the mountains anymore. She will work with some of you here in Santa Ana."

Laura C. Robinson

My head was spinning. Ed said something to me and disappeared, and then the rest of the crowd evaporated. I blindly stumbled to my room and fell asleep.

24 A TRIP TO THE PACIFIC COAST

When I finally recovered, I was still indecisive. I called Jason in Cebu and told him about the developments with the Treasure Hunter getting out of jail and sending ominous text messages trying to lure me into meeting him.

“I don’t know, Jason, I don’t know what to do, I think I might just go home.”

“Well, why don’t I just change my schedule around a bit and we could do the fieldwork we talked about, you know, traveling down the coast. South of you in Luzon. Surveying Negrito languages. A couple days.”

I hesitated because I had started getting into the idea of being back in the U.S. in the next week or so. My family had planned the memorial service for my grandmother for October 1, and I was hoping to attend. The trip down the coast would give me a few days to think, so I agreed.

I worked on linguistics with Gregory the following day. He had a crazy scheme for me to buy some land in town for his family and Taniel’s. I didn’t respond to him, but I asked Bill. He told me that the Ilokanos who offered to sell the land to Gregory for 5,000 pesos were squatters who didn’t own it. It was a typical local scam, Ilokanos offering to sell public land to the Agta.

I talked to Jason that night.

“So I’ll meet you in the north, then we’ll take the road east to the coast, then south along the coast.” He named a string of provinces and language groups we could visit.

“Sounds good, but are you sure there’s a road along the coast?”

“Oh yeah, why wouldn’t there be? It’s in my *Lonely Planet* guidebook. It’s always right. I never had a problem with it.”

“Are you sure? The *Lonely Planet* lists roads down the coast where I traveled this summer, and believe me, there are no roads out there.” But the opportunity to get away from the Treasure Hunter was more pressing than

a possible lack of roads through the jungle. I agreed to meet Jason the next day.

I stopped off in Tuguegarao, where I wanted to have my Ilokano dictionary bound. The book had fallen apart. I navigated the city's now-familiar smoggy streets until I found a sign that said Copy Shop. I handed over my worn pages and mumbled something about having it bound.

"Oh, my God. You speak Ilokano?" exclaimed the plump man in a loud falsetto. "Ma, she can speak Ilokano," he shouted to his invisible parent. "Say something in Ilokano! I lived here my whole life, and I don't speak Ilokano. But mom! She speaks Ilokano."

"I'll be back on Monday," I declared and turned to leave.

"Can we have your phone number? We're Jehovah's Witnesses. We can help you be saved."

"I don't have a phone," I said. "No phone, good-bye."

"Well, then your email address or something," his girlish voice followed me back out into the hot sun.

I got off the crowded bus in front of a giant statue of a rocking chair in the town of Ilagan, ate the most American lunch I could find—pizza—and caught a jeepney to the Provincial Planning and Development Office in town.

A good-looking man only a few years older than me said, "So, you are looking for maps, huh? Follow me." He led me into a small office and sat in front of his computer and asked, "Which maps?"

"Well, the entire region. Isabela Province, Cagayan Province, Quirino Province, and Nueva Vizcaya."

"You want me to print them out?"

"No, just put them on my flash drive." I handed him the device. He plugged it in and ran a virus scan.

"Great, you don't have any viruses." I smiled. His antivirus software must have been pretty outdated. "Is that it?" he asked, smiling back at me.

"Well, we were thinking of taking the road east to the Pacific, then down the coast. Is there a coastal road?"

"No, and there is no road from here to the Pacific, either." That was going to put a damper on our plans. "So, how come you're not married?" he teased. I mumbled, blushed, and ducked out of the office.

I dialed Jason and gave him the bad news. We agreed to meet at a town five hours south by bus.

The early afternoon sun beat down on the pavement in front of the concrete capitol building. I waited in front of a scrap-metal shop. One of the welders brought out a bench for me, and I sat listening to the grating

sound of metal on metal.

After I settled into the back of another air-conditioned bus, I saw two text messages from an anonymous phone. One was in Taglish, a mix of Tagalog and English that sounded a lot like Spanglish, and the other in Ilokano, but they both said, “Hi Laura. How’s the weather there where you are? I’m thinking of going there.”

The Treasure Hunter was trying to trick me into telling him where I was, but he would have to come up with something better than that. I shoved the phone back into my pocket and watched dilapidated concrete storefronts until I fell into a pleasant dream that disappeared when I awoke. It was dark by the time I received a text message from Jason that he was there and had found a hotel. He gave me the names of the towns I would pass through, and when I started to see the names on store signs, I asked the driver to let me know when we got to the MacDo’s in Cabanatuan.

The friendly golden arches soon popped into view, and there was Jason, hunched into a tiny tricycle right outside the bus door. I hopped in and Jason told the driver where we were going. I hadn’t seen my friend in eight months. His hair was trimmed short, but his beard had grown scraggly. He had a checkered *keffiyeh* around his neck, the kind that Yasser Arafat had worn, a black Che Guevara T-shirt, jean shorts, and black flip-flops with white socks. He immediately launched into a diatribe about how the hotel clerk had insisted that there were no poor people in America.

“It just pisses me off, but I got him agreeing with the Communist Manifesto in about two minutes,” he told me, and I smiled and nodded.

We checked into a hotel room with wooden floors, two full-sized beds and a shower with glass doors—and hot water. I showed him my maps, and he showed me his census figures, and we planned the trip. After I took a shower and we both crawled into our beds, we stayed awake until 2 talking about the Treasure Hunter, the Philippines, and language.

Beginning in 1915 and continuing for forty hard years, an eccentric pioneer linguist named John Peabody Harrington traveled alone from Alaska to South America documenting endangered native languages. He gathered more than a million pages of phonetic notations over four decades of wanderings and interviews. Harrington was a fanatic, obsessive, mistrustful of other scholars, and unable to work in an office. He was impatient to save the hundreds of dying languages he found and unwilling to polish his findings so that they could be published. He was secretive, disorganized, and wonderful.

After his death in 1961, it took decades to transfer his wildly scattered notes to microfilm. Someone even found a half-eaten sandwich in one box

of notes. Now Native American volunteers from tribes whose languages became extinct half a century ago are working with the J.P. Harrington Database Project at the University of California, Davis to relearn the words and songs of their ancestors and to reclaim their lost cultures.

I watched dust particles floating serenely in the air lit by a sunbeam that streamed through the window of our room. I had an unbreakable habit of checking my watch every morning. Eight o'clock, and Jason was still asleep. I wished I were. Staying up late talking with Jason was great, but we had to make it out to the Pacific coast that day.

I sent Ed a text message telling him not to worry. After breakfast I checked my email while Jason found an ATM. I had a message from the National Science Foundation. I had asked them if they would cancel my fellowship if I returned to America early.

"Thanks for your update. Your safety is our paramount concern, so by all means—leave the field." It was official. I could go home and not lose my grant.

Jason returned and we caught a bus; we were headed into the original boondocks. Languages tend to borrow words from another, and English is no exception. The Tagalog word for mountain is *bundok*. After the United States won the Spanish-American War and decided to keep the Philippines, Filipino nationalists began a guerilla war for independence. Following a series of hit-and-run battles, the Filipino insurgents fell back into the same mountains and jungles that Jason and I would now visit. The American troops, using the search-and-destroy-military strategy echoed at half-century intervals in Vietnam and in Iraq, mispronounced the Tagalog word and chased the insurgents into what the Americans called the boondocks.

I settled into the vinyl-covered wooden bench that passed for a seat on this third-class bus and tried to ignore the man reading his Bible in Tagalog in a loud voice perhaps hoping to simultaneously save his own soul and those of his fellow passengers. Jason was offended and said to me, "Hey, I'm the religious one. How come you're more tolerant of these nuts than me?" I ignored him, too.

The bus pulled out of the town past graffiti-covered walls and into endless expanses of rice fields and tin-roofed houses. After a few hours the bus stopped in front of some women grilling fish and everyone filed off to eat lunch. It was a long fish grill, but the mayor of Santa Ana would have been delighted to know that it fell well short of the Guinness world record.

"You coming for some food?" I asked.

"I don't eat on long trips like this."

"I do," I said. I reached into my backpack for my cell phone, but it was gone. I quickly searched my pockets, my bag, the floor, and Jason's bag. The last I had seen it was when I texted Ed that morning. Jason called my number and it didn't ring, so someone had probably already found it and

threw away the SIM card that held all my info. I had a funny feeling in my stomach but I knew it couldn't be the Treasure Hunter.

"Do you want to go back for it?" Jason asked as the other riders climbed onto the bus.

"Nah, I probably wouldn't find it anyway." The bus started again, and soon we were on a narrow dirt road. The tires kicked up dust that floated through the windows left open by the passengers because of the heat and stuck to my sweaty face and inside my mouth. I had long since drained my water bottle. When the bus was nearly empty, Jason asked if we could eventually be dropped off at the state capitol building. The friendly driver began chatting with Jason in Tagalog and I dozed off.

When we finally arrived, Jason got some large maps of Aurora Province in the capitol's map office and went to copy them. It was late in the afternoon, and we were in desperate need of showers, so I asked about hotels in town. I picked a mid-priced one that turned out to be a large white castle overgrown with black mold and an empty fountain. When a German Shepard ran out to greet us and barked, its tail wagging in unwelcome friendship, Jason jumped a foot in the air. We took the most expensive room.

"The shower doesn't work!" Jason screamed from the bathroom. "I hate showering with a bucket." I don't like cold-water bathing, whether there is a shower or not, but the TV in the room did have the Discovery Channel. Always a plus.

We woke up late and found a breakfast place on the beach. The coastline reminded me of Bolos Point, with trees extending all the way to the edge of the sand and few visible houses. Afterward, we waved down a tricycle. Jason told the driver in Tagalog, "We want to meet some Agta people," and the driver dropped us in front of a branch office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples. A man at the counter smiled at our introductions and called over an elderly, dark-skinned cleaning lady. She was a grandmother, and her sons could also speak Agta, so we arranged to meet her the following day. I smiled and nodded. We stepped out into a light rain, and Jason asked, "So, do you want to go find the Alta?"

"I'm too tired to do any real work; I could maybe go meet them to set up an interview, but I'm too tired to do anything serious. I gotta get some more sleep."

"Yeah, I'm tired too, let's just go find them to set up a meeting." A real rain—the heavy kind that only falls in the tropics—began to fall when we jumped into a tricycle, and as the passenger closest to the open door of the sidecar, I got soaked. The tricycle driver handed me his denim jacket to

drape over my lap, but it didn't help much.

We crossed a tiny bridge, a stream rushing beneath it, and our driver shouted to someone alongside the road, "Where do the Ayta live?" He used the Tagalog term that covered any group of indigenous black Filipinos. The man, indifferent to the pounding rain, pointed to a group of small concrete houses, one with bright red walls and a yellow roof and the next with yellow and green. We went to the nearest one and Jason told a woman who we were and asked, without any introduction, "What do you call your language?"

"Alta," she said, and Jason and I were thrilled. Lawrence Reid, the retired professor who had helped me pick the Dupaningan Agta language for my thesis, had spent a day here working on the local language in the mid-1980s, but nothing outside his data was known about Alta. We were led into a blue house with a red roof. The concrete floors were painted red and there was one small bedroom with no furniture, where a toddler slept naked in a hammock. A small wooden bench appeared, and we sat on it as two middle aged women and a group of teenagers sat on the floor before us, their hands folded, and looked at us as if we were the stars of a major traveling show.

"Do you want to just start now?" Jason whispered, and before I could say no, he produced a sixty-page legal-sized list of words in English and Tagalog.

Jason had memorized his list in Tagalog, but I struggled to fill in the answers on the damp pages, my mind as cloudy as the weather, and he didn't leave out a single word. After an hour, when the women started to look as tired as I felt, Jason disappeared to buy snacks.

As we ate, they told us about an upcoming beauty pageant. A shy pre-teen girl with large dark eyes smiled when they boasted that she was one of the competitors.

Taskmaster Jason continued on the list: "Ant," "honeybee," "cockroach," until sunset. My hand was cramped from three hours of continuous writing. Jason tried to be sympathetic, saying, "It's hard at first, but you'll get used to it." I preferred my own leisurely methods, but you can't argue with a man who was able to do detailed research on a hundred languages in two years. And he wouldn't have listened anyway.

When we got back to the hotel, I just wanted to crash, but there was a raucous party in the previously deserted dining room. People sat at banquet tables arranged in a U-shape around a karaoke machine—my heart sank when I saw it—loudly singing a Tagalog favorite. Dirty plates, cups, and empty bottles of rum and rice wine were scattered across the tables and on the floor as if a tsunami had dropped them as it retreated back to the ocean.

"What's going on here?" Jason asked the unlucky woman who had to run from the party to the front desk to hand us our key.

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

“It’s the owner’s birthday. Would you like some noodles and cake?” We politely declined, but she insisted, saying she would bring to it us later, and we didn’t argue. I thought I saw her wink at Jason as we retreated to our room.

25 WE SEARCH FOR THE ELUSIVE ARTA

The alarm clocks on our cell phones sounded simultaneously—I was borrowing Jason’s backup phone—and after I threw cold water on my face, I shook Jason’s arm until he opened his eyes. We caught a tricycle to the barangay of the ancient Agta cleaning woman we had arranged to interview.

We found her in a small concrete meeting hall. The Sunday service had just gotten over, so we had it to ourselves. We settled onto hard benches, and Jason started in on his list. She was good at translation, and her two sons soon joined us. When they started to look tired, I suggested it might be snack time, and he disappeared to buy soda and chips. I asked, “So, what do you call the language, anyway?”

“We are Umiray Dumaget.”

“Not Agta?”

“No, Agta just means “person” in our language.” Jason returned, and children began streaming into the meeting hall.

“My grandchildren.” She smiled as Jason gave them each a plastic bag full of soda and a bag of chips.

“Do they speak Umiray Dumaget?” I asked.

“They understand it, but don’t speak it. You see, it is only us here; we are the only Umiray here—only me, my eight children, and all my grandchildren. Over in Dibot, there are many Umiray, and there, the children speak the language.”

A few hours later, after lunch and more snacks, the word list was almost done, but we had a few hundred sentences left to translate. I whispered to Jason that they were exhausted, and we should continue another day, but he ignored me and forged ahead until, finally, we got to the last sentence on his list, which was, ironically, “Could you please say that to me again?” The woman and her sons looked relieved when Jason said it was over. They were even more pleased when Jason placed 500 pesos in the grandmother’s

hand.

The next day, it was back to the concrete government houses with orange window sills and blue roofs. The neat houses were a trade-off for giving up their semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

Even though we had told them we would return, the two women exclaimed, “Oh, you came back! Thank you so much for the help you gave us last time. We were able to buy rice.” They produced cups of coffee and the same small, handmade wooden bench. Jason didn’t drink coffee, so I made a show of drinking mine while he took a few polite sips. We picked up where we left off, and this time I wasn’t tired. Around lunchtime, the women said, “Lunch would be good now.”

It was a broad hint that Jason missed. “Yes, lunch would be good,” he replied and wrote down her sentence. The women smiled and nodded and told me how to get to the store a short walk away,

“Be careful, the men are drunk, look what they did yesterday,” they pointed to a tiny puppy dragging itself about by its front legs. “A man stepped on it. His spine is crushed. He’ll be like this for the rest of his life.” A dark little girl in a dirty flowered dress picked him up and gently wrapped him in a blanket as I ventured to the store. I shuddered at the cruelty of the men who had injured the dog and, for the first time in several days, I thought of the Treasure Hunter.

The women mixed the rice and sardines with a package of instant noodles, and we ate with our hands. Hours later when our list was finished, Jason shoved cash into numerous hands. We took photographs and they told us to come back again soon. The language was fascinating—it was rather different from the others in the area—and I made a mental note to come back, but it could be years, and that might be too late. The Alta language may soon be gone.

We checked out of the AMCO Hotel-by-the-Sea, stocked up on food, and made it to the station just in time to see the back of an overloaded bus bouncing away down the road.

“When’s the next one?” I asked a bored young soldier standing in the shade of a banana tree, the butt of his M-16 automatic rifle resting in the dirt. Jason didn’t talk to soldiers.

“In an hour,” he told me and smiled, pleased that I could speak Tagalog. When the next bus came, it was already jammed, and a throng of people, Jason and me included, mobbed around the door. The only seats left were in the back row between two soldiers, and we had to push people and battle our way through the aisle to win them.

It was going to be a long ride. The dirt road was more rutted than a fire trail in the California mountains. The engine spewed endless cheap-gasoline fumes, and I was starting to feel sick.

“I think I know why these languages are so different from the ones on

the other side of the mountains,” I mumbled. It was hard to imagine the different groups having much contact with each other when traveling between their areas was this difficult. Two of the most miserable hours of my life ended when we neared the town of Casiguran, where the road was even paved in brief sections.

Then the bus stopped abruptly for a police blockade. Armed soldiers waving rifles shouted for all the men to get off and show their papers.

“They’re probably looking for NPA,” I said quietly.

“We don’t speak Tagalog,” Jason whispered in English, and indicated for me to get off the bus with the men. The Filipino men lined up and produced little pink sheets of paper for inspection. The soldiers got bored before they reached the end of the line where Jason and I were and ordered everyone back onto the bus. A young girl was crying for her father.

“Oh, it’s okay,” Jason spoke soothingly but loudly in Tagalog. “The mean men have to show their big guns to make themselves feel important. They won’t hurt you.”

They didn’t hear him.

We asked for the local high school and were dropped off in front of a gated compound. Jason pulled out his ID and introduced us to the guard. We were soon ushered into rattan chairs in the office of the principal.

“What can I do for you?” the rotund man asked in a honey-coated voice and smiled as he gazed into Jason’s eyes.

“We’d like to borrow one of your classes, hopefully a class of seniors, for a class period. We want them to write in Kasiguranin language.”

“I think we can arrange that. Come this way.” The school consisted of a classroom building without a roof, a large grass field, and another classroom building on the far side. We were led into a roofed classroom, and after a brief introduction, the senior English class was turned over to Jason.

“So. I want you to write in your language, in Kasiguranin. How many of you speak Kasiguranin?” They giggled and all the students save one raised their hands.

“She’s from Baler,” the teacher whispered in my ear.

“How many of you have ever written in Kasiguranin?” Nobody raised a hand. “Okay, well, I just want you to write it the best you can. Just write it like Tagalog.”

One of the girls raised her hand. “What about a word like *katibek*? How can we write that?” The word had a vowel that didn’t exist in Tagalog.

“Do your best,” Jason handed them sheets of paper. He suggested some topics and wrote them on the board in English. The students went to work

and we moved outside with the teacher and the principal.

“Do you want to stay here at the school while you are in Casiguran?” Before I could say no, Jason quickly agreed. We gathered up the writings and a girl asked Jason to read one out loud. He chose hers and struggled through the unfamiliar language. Then it was my turn, and I read a student’s story about how a teenage girl embarrassed herself in front of a cute boy. The theme was universal, but I was amazed at how much I could read and understand even though the language spoken here was as different from the Dupanangan Agta as English is different from German. The little words, like *the*, *and*, and *of* were all Tagalog and the important words like *go*, *make*, *house*, *walk* and *sit* were all like Dupanangan Agta.



FIGURE 10 LAURA WITH CASIGURAN AGTA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Kasiguranin was a contact language; all the grammar came from Tagalog and the vocabulary from Agta. When Filipinos first came to the Casiguran Bay speaking a form of Old Tagalog, they shared no language in common with the local Agta. They must have learned enough words from the Agta so that the two groups could communicate, but they used them in their Tagalog grammar and kept a lot of little grammatical words from Tagalog. Over generations, this trade language became what’s called a creole, and the native tongue of non-Negritos in the isolated Casiguran community where this high school was located.

The teenagers thanked us profusely for saving them from last-period English and the principal showed us to our room, a dark computer lab with one monitor and a single cot shoved in the corner.

“Can you share a single room?” the friendly principal asked.

“Yes, but we’ll need a second bed,” Jason informed him, and one of the teachers hovering around offered to fetch a small futon.

“The bathrooms are just here,” the principal pointed to two outhouses. It was now clear, even to Jason, that he had made a mistake in accepting the invitation. He could put up with no hot water and sleep almost anywhere, but a flush toilet and a working shower were essential to the man’s happiness.

The rotund principal asked, “So, do you guys have boyfriends?”

“Yes,” I lied.

“No, I don’t have a boyfriend,” Jason said, and changed the topic.

The principal apologized for how quiet this community was.

“Well, at least you don’t have the loud karaoke going into the middle of the night, like where I live in Cagayan,” I offered.

The principal smirked, “Well, there is one karaoke bar,” giving the distinct impression that I was in the company of its best patron.

Someone in the background offered to cook us dinner in the school cafeteria, but we escaped to the town of Casiguran for a restaurant meal and a \$10 phone card—the most expensive one available—that I could use with my loaner phone.

Back at the school, talking with several teachers and the principal, we were once again the entertainment in the sleepy town. When electricity went off—a regular occurrence—we decided to retire to our computer lab and dropped off to the sounds of frogs croaking and insects humming in the night.

We were sitting at a concrete bus shelter by 10 the next morning waiting for a bus north. At some point we would need a boat, but first we had to get a wheeled vehicle, and fate wasn’t smiling on us that morning. By noon, the rumor at the bus stop was that the road was flooded and nothing was traveling north. We waited anyway. We were done with Casiguran, and the road south that had made me so ill held little appeal.

We would be traveling across the border that separated the people who used Tagalog as a lingua franca from those that used Ilokano. That these two languages were so widely used was a relic of early expansions of two separate linguistic groups in the two areas.

I decided to have our word list translated from Tagalog into Ilokano. I listened at the bus stop until I heard Ilokano speakers, and started by asking

them a few words, until I had a whole group of Ilokano speakers arguing with each other about the proper translations of “mosquito net” and “ringworm.” Finally, a jeepney showed up in the early afternoon, and Jason and I, along with a throng of men, women, children, and rice sacks, piled into a vehicle already full of people—and a tractor engine.

A few young men climbed on top of the jeepney. We waited, and more and more passengers came and were relegated to the smooth roof of the little bus-like vehicle. Jason asked a few questions about catching boats, and soon everyone on the jeepney was telling us that we needed to get off here, at this little dusty junction, if we wanted to take a boat. Jason was skeptical, hoping to charter our own boat from a bit further north, but I was hungry and tired, and when I threw my backpack out the vacant space that should have been a jeepney window and climbed through the opening, Jason followed.

The ocean was a short walk from the bus stop. We quickly located a boat, but it wasn’t going where we wanted. We got a tricycle into the next town and ate at a stand with pastries in a glass case and a Tagalog soap opera on the tube. With a bit of food and caffeine in me, I agreed to the trip further north.

We managed to find our old trusty jeepney parked, now devoid of passengers but piled high with vegetables, and we hovered outside until the driver said it was leaving. We fought a group of middle-aged women for seats next to sacks of potatoes. Our driver stopped four times in the next two hundred meters to load up with rice and vegetables, and by the time we left town, the sun was setting. The paved road ended before the last building was out of sight, and soon we teetered precariously in the half-light on a narrow muddy road with a precipitous drop to the angry ocean on one side and a rocky mountain cliff on the other. The bus swayed back and forth toward the edge and disaster, and then almost scraping the cliff, and then back, and Jason and I agreed that this would make a good story if we lived to return to civilization.

Was documenting an endangered language worth it?

“This guy must do this every day,” I tried to reassure Jason and myself as I buried my face in my backpack. The inside light of the jeepney flickered off and Jason opened his phone to shed a bit of light.

“We don’t have to be so uncivilized, riding in the dark,” he explained. The bus crawled to a stop on an upward slope. We climbed out and walked up the hill. At the top we climbed back in and teetered on between destruction and Dinapigue, our destination. As the town finally came into sight, Jason said, “Let’s never take that road again.”

We had reached the end of the highway. The only road out was the one we took to get in.

The best time for boating in the Philippines is in the middle of the

night, when the sea was calm, so I suggested we go look for one.

We asked around town and learned that the boat would cost 5,000 pesos, which was more than we were prepared to pay. With a monopoly on transportation, the mayor had established a set price that all foreigners had to pay—although I couldn't imagine that there were many of us here—and so we found a lodging house without lights and slept soundly.

In the bright morning, a friendly woman outside our hotel directed us to a low-slung tenement row on the edge of town, the best place, she said, to find Agta. I could imagine *Oliver Twist's* gang slumming in the line of one-room wooden houses while children played hopscotch in the dirt. A lone palm tree had grown high enough to flee the poverty. Some kids led us to a woman who ushered us into the next house, where a middle-aged man roused himself out of the top bunk to greet us. Jason explained what we were doing, and he instantly agreed to help.

"Let's get started. No work for me today at the mill." He lit a cigarette and his wide-eyed son came to sit next to him with a pen and a notebook in hand. The son giggled when we asked for the word for "penis," and his father chastised him. "This is important, son, like talking to a doctor."

That night, the only restaurant in town had a hand-printed sign in the window saying "Closed on Sunday," although it was hard to imagine that the dirty, table-less facility had ever been open. We passed it and found a woman pushing a wagon selling skewers of unknown cooked meats, and I bought three. Jason, in his Fidel Castro T-shirt, and I, in a collared shirt, strolled along the one-lane paved road as teenagers played basketball. A skinny kid tried to grab a skewer from my hand, but Jason growled at him, and the boy slunk away.

We overslept for the morning bus, and were enjoying the only cold Cokes to be had in town after another power outage, when a group of Agta women walked by.

"Do you think they're from here? Let's do an interview," I suggested, and Jason jumped from his chair, ran into the road, and caught up to them. When he returned, he said, "We'll meet them in an hour over by the church. We won't have time to ask everything."

We picked out the words that seemed to be highly variable in this coastal region as we finished our drinks. When a language variety is a distant dialect or a closely related language, like Spanish and Portuguese or American English and Scottish English, then there is no point in asking for words like "mother," which were likely to be the same. We needed to get at the more obscure words where the likely variation lay.

An unpainted, open-air wooden building with a small white cross hanging from the eaves stood at the end of the dirt road, and the group of dark-skinned women were squatting under a shady tree. They produced a bench from inside the church and we sat with them. We started with the

sentences, knowing that we might not finish even the truncated word list before dark.

“I will leave later on,” Jason started in Tagalog.

“We will leave later,” she replied in Agta.

“No, no, *I* will leave later.”

She tried again, “You will leave later.”

Jason moved on to the next sentence. “When are you leaving?”

“When are you returning?”

“This is like pulling teeth,” Jason muttered in English. We worked until dark, moved into the church for light, and kept working. When we finished, we still had a few hours until the next bus left town, and we spent them with our new friend. She walked us to the bus stop just before midnight. We thanked her and climbed aboard. It was the last we ever heard from her because a class-four typhoon ripped through Dinapigue a month later, leaving the town destroyed and a dozen people dead.

The bus careened around cliffs in the dark while I tried to sleep and Jason listened to his iPod. I was jostled awake as we slowed.

“There’s a semi stuck in the mud up ahead,” Jason explained when I opened one eye. Other buses and jeepneys had given up hope of getting past and passengers had begun to camp by the side of the road, but our driver saw an opening, revved the engine and went for it, and then with a sickening sucking sound from the wheels, our bus stopped. With one set of wheels firmly wedged in the mud next to the semi, the other stuck on an embankment of mud that looked like it could start sliding and envelope us at any minute, and the bus teetering at a 45-degree angle over the semi, Jason and I scurried off with the other worried passengers. The driver and conductor dug out the embankment under the bus one shovel-full at a time while I dozed on a rock and Jason chatted with a police officer about the Agta.

Jason seemed to be asking me a question, and shook myself alert.

“Huh, uh, yes, it’s true some Agta traditionally filed their teeth into points for beauty.”

There was a commotion by the bus. The driver called for all able-bodied men to pull the vehicle clear with a rope attached to the grill. Jason gathered with the other men while I looked on. I was glad I wasn’t a man so I didn’t have to pull.

The line of men gave the rope one hard yank. It jerked tight; the bus wobbled forward, began to topple, and landed upright. Everyone cheered without a trace of irony, and we filed back on. It was bright again as we passed by Agta camps in a mountainous region.

“Hey, an Agta family is riding on top of the bus,” Jason told me when he noticed I was awake. “We should find out where they’re from and see if they’ll do an interview.” But that was too difficult to accomplish even for

Jason as our bus jolted and rocked along the muddy mountain road.

As the bus descended into the flatlands we saw a deep river, fifty yards across, but no bridge. A half-dozen buses and jeepneys were parked in the mud along the bank, and scores of people milled about near a rice-cake vendor. A giant raft, floating on empty metal barrels, was maneuvered into place with ropes tied to docks on each shore so that the raft could be motored and pulled from one side to the other without drifting downstream.

A jeepney, painted a jumble of primary colors by an unheralded abstract artist, was first in line on our side, patiently waiting its turn to board. There were four other vehicles ahead of ours, so we got off to wait. We spotted an Agta teenager who, in an effort to ignore his fellow passengers, had climbed atop a jeepney and stared across the river to the throng on the opposite shore. Not wishing to appear stalkerish, Jason and I refrained from clambering up the jeepney to ask him where he was from and what language he spoke. We squatted in the sand as the morning sun began to beat down in anticipation of an unbearably hot day.

An hour passed by, then a second, and some newly arrived vehicles, perhaps with discrete bribes, passed over the river while we were waiting. Jason and I abandoned our vehicle and hopped onto the next raft, found a jeepney on the far side, and sped on toward our destination.

“Finally! Paved road!” Jason exulted when we neared a town.

“Finally! Ice cream!” I countered, pointing to the blue sign I recognized long before I could read the word Nestle.

“Now we need to find a bus to the capitol so we can get maps,” Jason continued, ignoring me. I just wanted to get something to eat and find a bed in a clean hotel, but it was already afternoon, and Jason was determined to accomplish something that day.

We ended up at the office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, hoping they might know where groups of Agta lived. A round man, dark-skinned, in a polo shirt offered us coffee when Jason gave him our usual spiel.

“I don’t drink coffee, but she might like some,” Jason told him. He appreciated being able to vicariously accept the invitation for what he considered a vile beverage. “Do you know where any Agta groups live?” Jason whisked out our maps and placed them on a table in front of the man.

“You should go to Nagtipunan; the mayor is Ifugao. Interview him. Why would you interview Agta? They’re dirty. Agta are lazy. Ifugao like us, we’re hard-working people.”

Jason’s eyes widened. He straightened his back and he calmly told the Ifugao man that he liked to punch racists. The civil servant was confused. He had never met a racist, but figured it must be a problem in America with all the Negroes. I grabbed Jason’s arm and dragged him out the door as he

threw one last incomprehensible insult in Tagalog over his shoulder: “No wonder the rebels abhor the government.”

We still had one task left for that long day: track down the mysterious Arta. Lawrence Reid had tried to convince me to work on the Arta language for my dissertation. “There were twelve speakers when I was there in 1987,” he had told me, “but I got word that one died a few years ago, so there are eleven speakers now.” I didn’t want to stake my dissertation on those eleven people still being alive twenty years later, but it was worth looking for them that afternoon.

We had the name of the neighborhood where they had lived in the 1980s. We asked at the local school if they knew any Agta, because the Arta would look black like the Agta, and we couldn’t count on local people knowing the name of that tiny language group.

A young teacher referred us to the long-time school principal, who said that some Agta had lived there years ago. He didn’t know where they went. The principal and his wife told us to talk to an old couple who had lived in the town for many years. We walked to a dusty wooden shop where an elderly lady offered us sodas. We bought two and asked if they knew about the Agta that used to live there.

“Oh, you mean the *Negritos*,” she carefully pronounced the word used by academics to define the ethnic group, but was rarely heard outside the research world. “Honey, do you remember what happened to the *Negritos* that used to live here? What were their names?”

Jason suggested some of the names that Lawrence had told us.

“Yes, Powell, there was a gentleman by that name, but when he died, they all left. Isn’t that right, honey?”

“Yeah, we haven’t seen any *Negritos* around here for ten, fifteen years. Someone said they went to Villa Gracia. That Powell Honrado was a good man.”

We asked around town trying to arrange a ride to Villa Gracia, but no one was going for several days. We decided to see if we could find another group of Agta instead of searching for the elusive Arta and found a chubby young basketball player who pointed across an expanse of rice fields to a cluster of trees. He agreed to take us there, picked up a machete that he kept beside the basketball court, and soon we entered a dense rain forest, our host chopping through the brush. Four whacks with the machete, about three of his long strides, and we emerged on the bank of a wide, shallow river.



FIGURE 11 THE NAGTIPUNAN AGTA CAMP

The Agta man we found at a group of stick huts covered in cheap plastic tarps agreed to an interview, and we sat with him in the dirt on empty rice sacks. Jason conducted the interview in Tagalog, and I translated the difficult words, like “grasshopper,” into the Ilokano that was more familiar to our speaker. But with Jason’s lightning speed, I could barely write down a word before he was onto the next.

When we finished, the last jeepney out of that sleepy town was long gone, but day laborers from the rice farms were piled into the bed of a large truck, and they welcomed us aboard. I was invited into the cab, and Jason climbed in back. A large woman sat beside the driver, and I was crammed uncomfortably against the door. As we stopped at every hut and nameless town to let off the laborers, she told me of her dream to live in the United States.

“But I need two million pesos for the American government to even consider my visa,” she complained. She was applying for a tourist visa and planned to become one of the fabulously wealthy masses once she was there. The entire Philippine middle class had the same plan.

“Forty thousand dollars isn’t even enough money to buy a house in America,” I warned. “If you had two million pesos, you could build a mansion in the Philippines.”

She was dreaming of the gold-paved streets in a wonderful land and did

not hear my words. But dreams of great riches is not the only reason why Filipinos love America. At the beginning of World War II, the Japanese army invaded the Philippines, quickly overran the American/Filipino garrison, and undertook a campaign of unbelievable ferocity against the civilian population including murder, rape, torture, and starvation that didn't end until the islands were liberated at the end of the war in 1945.

The next year, the U.S. granted independence to the Philippines. The lesson the Filipino survivors learned was that their country could not defend itself against powerful enemies and that it needed American military and economic support. Memories of that terrible war have faded, conflicts between the two countries have come and gone, and popular and unpopular leaders of both countries have passed from the scene, but the good feelings of the Filipino people toward Americans have not dimmed.

We got dropped off in town, and Jason headed straight for the coconut stand. A small, strange-looking young woman stuck her hand out at me and I shook it, not stopping to wonder why. I was sipping juice from a straw poked into my coconut when Jason suddenly pulled out his oversized flashlight and shone it on the strange-looking woman, who had her hand in my pocket.

"Get out of here, or I'll beat you to death!" Jason roared, and the coconut lady looked unsure whether to be appalled at the pickpocket or at the huge American.

On our last morning together in the town of Cauayan—Jason would have to go back to Manila the following day—we ate a leisurely breakfast at Jollibee, a popular American-style fast-food place, and went to the office of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples.

"What do you want?" a woman confronted us when we knocked on the door.

"We'd like to speak to someone about our research," Jason started.

"Nobody's here." She began to push the door in our faces.

"When will they be back?"

"Tuesday." She slammed the door.

We returned to Jollibee's and talked with a friendly Filipino waitress. Once she understood our problem, she went to the open door and began to shout at the people passing by: "Mike, what language do you speak?"

"Itawit," Mike called back. That was a language we wanted to document.

"Are you free today?" The Jollibee girl had a booming voice that didn't need amplification.

"No, I'm busy!"

"Do you have any relatives who are free for the day?" I shouted with enough gusto for all the town to hear.

"No!"

The girl turned to us, shaking her head in sympathy, but then grinned.

“Those tricycle drivers over there are all Ibanag.”

It was a Friday morning, but several teenagers who should have been in school sat on a cracked and crumbling concrete basketball court and watched us approach the tricycle drivers.

Jason asked, “Do you guys have any relatives who are free for the day?”

One driver said he did. He introduced us to a tall, skinny, quiet man, the driver’s brother, and we walked with him to a nearby house and sat in his small living room while the entire village stared in through the door and the hole in the wall that passed for a window.

Jason explained what we were doing, and our victim stared ahead expectantly, waiting for the first word. Jason forged ahead in Tagalog, and the man only occasionally turned to me for a translation into the more familiar Ilokano and even more occasionally to his elderly aunt for the “pure” Ibanag words. Hour after hour of verbs, nouns, and prepositions floated by, and then phrases and sentences, and when the sun began to set our gracious host reminded us gently that we would be unable to find a tricycle if we waited much longer. We thanked him, insisted he take the money we offered, and let him pay the small sum for a tricycle.

It was time for Jason to get his bi-monthly visa renewal. We agreed to publish an article together based on our fieldwork, and I escorted him to the main road. When a first class, air-conditioned bus with a bathroom in the back stopped, Jason broke his self-imposed ban on luxury and boarded. I waved good-bye.

The next day, I made my way back to Santa Ana on the slowest bus in Oceania.

26 HEY, IS THIS YOUR GUN?

Once again, good news was waiting for me in Santa Ana. Somebody had put up a soft-serve ice-cream machine in the market. Over the next few weeks, the tall and slender young man who ran the machine would get to know what I wanted: the flavor of the day—there was only one, so it was an easy choice—with chocolate syrup and sprinkles in the largest cup he had, which would have been a small in an American ice-cream shop but only cost 25 cents.

Even better news was that the Treasure Hunter had disappeared. No one knew why he left or where he went. Maybe he just got tired of waiting for me or maybe some man with a gun ran him out of town. I didn't know, and I didn't care. With no recent sightings of him or anyone else stalking and threatening to kidnap me, Santa Ana was becoming downright livable. With high-speed Internet, I could stay there forever.

Bribing my friends with ice cream to help, I spent my time translating all of the Jason/Laura word lists and sentences into Ilokano, pausing only to swim in the ocean with JJ, Fidel's replacement as shop boy at the shoe store. JJ was a pleasant 17 year old, but when he tried to convince me to go to the Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall with him, I decided I didn't need a swimming partner. But the following Monday when I needed a companion to go with me to a new Agta camp, JJ was the only volunteer.

As we jostled along in a tricycle, JJ pointed out a group of men and woman oddly out of place on the muddy road in their pressed, collared shirts and black leather shoes. Jehovah's Witnesses distributing their monthly notice of the coming of the Lord to the Agta, who couldn't read. Our tricycle stopped in front of nine tiny one-room concrete houses—unpainted, with dark mildew stains on their walls—which lined the wide, unpaved road. These Agta had given up their hunter-gather lifestyle for government housing, at least for now.

A commotion arose from one house, where a group of Agta hunters had arrived with a small wild pig. The fat pink animal, bound with rattan, grunted and blinked rapidly in shock. Never forgetting my roots in anthropology from my undergraduate days, I asked, "Can I videotape the butchering?" The hunters agreed, and I pulled my lightweight camera out of my backpack and filmed, dancing around them as they slit the pig's throat, drained its blood, charred and skinned the flesh, and finally chopped the meat into large chunks. It was like taping the climactic scene in *The Lord of the Flies*. I was allowed to purchase a half-kilo of the red meat, which proved to be quite tasty.

An Agta woman, the leader of the community, prepared my wild pig in a light stew of green papayas. As we finished our feast, the gang of Jehovah's Witnesses claimed JJ for the long walk back to town, and I trolled around the small community with my pen, high-tech equipment, and a word list searching for victims.

The first house of women and girls struggled over every word. I excused myself and was led to the house of an ailing man unable to join his brethren for a day of hard labor in someone else's cornfield. He was skinny and tall for an Agta, and he reclined in the corner on a rattan bed. His wife sat next to me on a narrow bench, and when I asked a word she shouted it at her partially deaf husband, and he mumbled an answer. She was his low-tech megaphone, only changing a syllable here and there. When we finished my list, the good couple agreed to be my host family for the evening.

In the middle of cooking a dinner of rice and the canned tuna that I had brought in my backpack, the previously jovial woman hissed to me, "Go inside, there are *ugden* coming." Her tone made me obey instantly. I hurried into her hut, laid my head down on my sleeping mat, and listened as a group of men and women talked excitedly with my hostess. I could tell from the sound of plates that they had begun to eat our dinner.

The Agta woman excused herself and appeared in the hut, standing over me. I didn't protest as she silently threw a blanket over my body and moved the kerosene lamp so that I was less visible. I fished for my cell phone and turned it off. One of the visitors must have followed the Agta woman and spotted my form under the blanket. Her voice came from the doorway: "Oh, do you have a sick relative?"

"Just a friend." My host's voice was tense.

The woman demanded, "How do you know this person?"

"She's a pastor, a missionary," the Agta woman replied too quickly.

"Can we meet her?"

My hostess shook the blanket, and said quietly in Agta, "There are some People From The Mountains here. Do you understand?" She used the widespread Agta euphemism for the communist New People's Army guerillas. "They want to meet you." Her voice was low and full of fear. "Do

you want to come out?”

“Do you think it’s a bad idea?” I asked in Agta.

“No, you should come.” I shoved my wallet and cell phone under the blanket and emerged into the concrete room lit by a gas lamp made from a small gin bottle. A pretty young woman in her early twenties wearing fatigues and muddy boots stood in the doorway. She was slim, not much taller than me, and she had an oval face, dark eyes, and black hair under a beat-up camouflage cap like the one Fidel Castro wore on Jason’s T-shirt. A man and another woman leaned in the two glassless window frames of the hut, and I could see another man outside squatting in the dirt with my hostess’ husband.

“Oh, we didn’t realize you were white,” the woman said in Tagalog. “Do you speak Tagalog?”

“And Ilokano,” I answered.

She switched into the Ilokano of the people, “Are you scared?”

I shrugged my shoulders, “Not really,” I lied. “Why would I be scared?”

“Maybe you saw our guns.”

“I didn’t see any guns,” I answered truthfully, then turned my head to see an assault rifle resting by the door.

“What do you do here?” she asked.

“I study Agta language.” The kindly Agta woman intended to do me a favor by proclaiming I was a missionary in that very pro-missionary country, but it put me in a bind with the communists.

“But you are a missionary,” she accused.

It wouldn’t be credible to contradict my Agta hostess so I said the first excuse that came into my mind, “Eventually, we will translate the Bible into Agta, but right now, I just study the language. I am a student.”

“Where are you based in the Philippines?”

“In Tuguegarao,” I lied again.

My clever interrogator continued, “Where in Tuguegarao?” I guessed from her accent and vocabulary that she might be a recent graduate of the University of the Philippines in Manila.

“Ha, ha. Isn’t it funny the way sister Laura talks?” I turned my head to see the old Agta man I had filmed butchering the pig earlier in the day now leaning in the window. He could see I was about to get caught in my own lies. The brave old man laughed at me again.

She changed tactics and spoke with a friendly tone. “So, isn’t America great? You don’t have poor people in America, not like here, with our corrupt government.”

I relaxed a bit, and talked about how terrible the Bush administration was, and how I opposed the war in Iraq, and how terrible Americans were for neglecting the poor. I meant it, but would she believe me?

“So, have you heard of the NPA?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“What do you know about us?”

“Well, I know they started during the Marcos regime to fight all the bad things he did and help the poor,” I offered. She elaborated on that, and told of their courage and struggle against oppression while I nodded approvingly.

“Where are you guys from?” I asked.

“From the people. From the Philippines,” she said grandly. “We even have two Agta with us,” she pointed to two young Agta girls.

“Agta,” I corrected her, annoyed that the people’s revolutionaries used the same offensive name for black people that some of the prejudiced Ilokanos used.

“But I’m Atta,” one NPA girl said with shyness.

“Oh, are you from Pamplona, then?” I asked, forgetting that I had been told they were all “from the Philippines.”

“Yeah,” she said, embarrassed that I had guessed her hometown based on the name of her language. The other black girl said she was Agta from Villa Gracia, but I recognized her vocabulary, and she, too, agreed when I said that she must be from Maddela, where Jason and I had crossed the river by ferry boat.

The NPA soldiers became restless to leave and walked outside, where they waited for their comrades who had gone to the next house. “They want to ask you for money for coffee, but they are embarrassed,” my hostess whispered in Agta as she walked past me.

“Well, let them ask me to my face,” I whispered back.

“They are not allowed to ask for money.” I thought it was a bizarre philosophy that allowed the NPA to eat the food of the Agta who were so poor they often had none, threaten to kidnap someone in Santa Ana and murder others, but not ask an American for coffee money. My interviewer returned and stood in the doorway, and so I began to complain to her about the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples and how the government did nothing to help the Agta. My legitimate complaint soon became a rant.

“You know, things wouldn’t be so bad if they just had access to birth control; most of them want it and can’t get it.”

“Isn’t that against your religion?” she asked.

“No,” I said flatly.

She became suspicious of me again and asked about my family. “What does your brother do for a living?”

“He works for a car-rental place,” I explained.

“Does he own it?” This was clearly an important question.

Fortunately, my parents had graduated from Berkeley in the 60s and my friends and I had hung around Telegraph Avenue on many occasions when

we were in high school, so I knew what she wanted to hear: “Oh, no. He just works there. He’s a worker.”

I could see her relax. “What do your parents do for a living?”

“My dad works for a union and my mom is a social worker.”

“Oh.” She looked confused. The concepts of Americans and unions and workers did not seem to mix in her mind. Then she almost smiled and said, “You’re good people.”

She looked out at her comrades. “But you’re still single? You know, we have some eligible bachelors here,” and she pointed to two of her male colleagues outside the front door, leaning on their guns just past the glow from the house. I could almost hear them blush. A tricycle drove by on the road down the hill from us, its motor coughing and then reviving. The men tensed, and one of the eligible bachelors picked up his weapon and pointed it toward the sound.

“Who is that?” the lead woman barked at my Agta hostess.

“Uh, they always go by at this time,” she stammered. “They’re going back, going back to their barangay.”

The woman turned to me and asked in a harsh voice, “Do you have a cell phone?”

“No.”

“Well, don’t tell anyone you saw us, okay?” She smiled as if she were my friend.

“I won’t,” I said in my most reassuring tone.

“Okay, we’re leaving now. It was nice to meet you,” she said. The guerillas got in line, and one of the Agta men prepared to lead them to the next valley.

“Man, it’s cold,” the other bachelor complained.

“If you think this is cold, you should come to America sometime,” I called out, forgetting for a moment that they were the ones with the guns. He grunted something in return as the line of guerillas started to move.

“Hey, is this your gun?” I pointed to an orphaned rifle, loaded with an angry-looking ammunition clip, lying on the floor by the door, and the beautiful leader ran back.

“That’s mine. Thanks.” She slung its strap over her shoulder so that the weapon pointed straight at the ceiling and rejoined the line of ragtag soldiers, and they departed.

I was tired in the morning from a restless night. I’d woken constantly, my arms, stomach, and neck tense while I listened for any unusual noises. I text-messaged Jason, *I had a run-in with some of your comrades.*

Cool! Jason replied. *You’ll have to tell me all about it. If they took anything, I can*

go to their headquarters here in Manila and get it back.

Each language provides a unique view of the world. That is one reason why translation is always an approximation and sometimes an imperfect attempt to convey an entirely different worldview. The Agta languages reflect the Agta people's close link with the spirit world. Agta has many words, phrases, and metaphors for ghosts and their relationships with this world and the dream world, and with people both dead and living.

In the morning my Agta hosts, afraid to utter the name NPA and no longer calling the guerillas the "People From the Mountains," spoke of the "apparitions" who had visited us the night before. This is the closest English word to translate what they said, but it does not include their sense of menace and foreboding.

We ate a breakfast of rice and canned tuna, finished translating my list, and the man told me of a nearby Agta settlement where he was sure the Agta could help me with more translations.

There are many reasons why Agta hunter-gatherers leave one site and move to another—poor hunting or fishing, depleted local vegetation, fights with relatives or friends, natural disasters—and ghost sightings. The man, his wife Shirley, and their baby were eager to leave their now-haunted government house and village and escort me to another Agta camp. We packed our belongings and began the long walk to where we could catch a tricycle.

27 BUFFALO'S WIFE

“Do you want an orange?” Shirley asked. She disappeared into the brush and came back with three perfectly round, softball-sized yellow fruits. She cracked one open and as I ate the orange-colored, sour-tasting passion fruit, a tricycle stopped and we hopped on.

After a few minutes of tropical scenery, the Agta family and I found ourselves standing in the hot, dusty driveway of an upper-middle-class house, while the Ilokano owners sat on plastic lawn chairs and downed shots of liquor. Shirley introduced me and mentioned we hadn't eaten anything all day. They invited me into their home.

“My sister,” I started, and Shirley shook her head.

“No, you go in and eat. I'll be all right,” she said in our secret-code language.

“Wow! You speak their language too?” The woman was enthusiastic as I sat down in front of a plate of *dinadaran*, intestines cooked in blood. Not my favorite dish, but it would have tasted okay if they had been so kind as to not tell me what it was.

The twice-weekly truck which had occasioned the Wednesday afternoon festivities arrived, and twenty of us piled in the back on top of sacks of rice and other vegetables. Four young women grouped close together laughed and passed a liquor bottle, each taking large swigs, as the truck bumped over dry riverbeds and boulders on a road that was invisible to the uninitiated.

“Peanuts!” Shirley yelled as we hit one particularly deep rut, and the Ilokano women smiled at the bizarre curse.

The truck dropped us off near a small grass meadow, and one of the drunken women led us to a tiny one-room wooden house where an Agta grandmother was preparing food and young teenagers lounged about. The mosquitoes were beginning to bite as the sun set.

More and more people arrived until half the community was crammed into the tiny hut, and Shirley explained who I was and why I was there while her near-deaf husband shouted answers to questions. After dinner, I got out my word list and put on my head-mounted flashlight, always a hit when people first saw me wear it. The crowd held long debates about each Ilokano word I asked until a consensus was reached and I was informed of the proper Agta translation.

The children sat in silence because they only knew a few Agta words, until one middle-aged woman authoritatively took over the interview.

“*Darangat*. The palate of the mouth is called *darangat*.” Nobody argued, as she gave the Agta words so quickly I could barely write them down. After a while, the families with children began to disappear and a few of the men adopted reclining positions.

“Are you tired? We could continue tomorrow.” I offered.

“No, I have to work milling rice tomorrow, and none of them could help you much. You see, I’m from Tanglagan, and Uncle Joe lived there for many years. He taught us how to speak Agta. I was sorry when he moved to Bolos Point.” She was referring to Joe McAlpin of SIL.

“It is my duty to help you,” she told me, and so we forged on until nearly midnight, when I finally had to admit that I was too exhausted to continue.

The next day it was announced that we would go on a picnic, hiking upstream with all the children, fishing along the way.

The deaf Agta husband stage whispered to me, “The man who bought the birds’ nests from us is no good. He steals things, and we don’t want to leave you alone in this house until the man of the house comes back tomorrow.”

One young woman stayed behind with a foot that was badly infected and beginning to peel. I had washed it with soap and applied alcohol, and then her mother wrapped it in a poultice of guava leaves. I had seen Eden use the highly potent antibiotic on Bill, and it had cured his infected leg in short order. We hiked upstream past rice fields that clung to steep hillsides. I struggled with my broken flip-flops, and was grateful to stop under a tree near a bend in a river with good fishing. The young boys slipped their goggles on and jumped in the flowing water. Their mothers and fathers screamed, “There, There! Get that one!” and soon one had a big fish in his hands, which he tossed toward me on shore. The fish flopped and gasped for air, and the boys hopped back over the rocks and flung their small spears anew into the clear water.

The gang of fisherboys proceeded upstream, leaving me to have a leisurely bath in the river and then sit in the shade next to the rising smoke of the fire and chat with the woman from the previous night. More boys leaped among the boulders in the river, throwing rocks at each other as

dogs splashed in the water behind them.

I switched back and forth between speaking Agta with the woman and Ilokano with a beardless young man whose Agta skills were shaky. She told me about the town she was from and taught me the names of all the plants and trees we could see and the fish we would be eating, and I scratched the words into the dingy notebook that lived in the side pocket of my cargo pants.

When the fisher boys returned we ate scalded *burasi*—flavorful and juicy—over rice. We began to walk downstream as the shadows grew long, and then dark clouds suddenly appeared and in an instant we were in the middle of a downpour. Someone put a banana frond in my hand, and I placed it over my head, but it only kept a small patch of my hair dry, and I began to worry about my video camera and microphones in my backpack. There was nothing to do but take off my broken flip-flops and wade through a stream that hadn't existed a moment before. By the time the rain stopped ten minutes later, there was not a dry bit of clothing on my body, and I tossed away my useless banana frond.

Despite being cold and wet, I was excited about going to Tanglagan, where the very fluent woman was from, but as we walked back Shirley cautioned me.

“If the apparitions from the mountains were in our town the day before yesterday, and people saw them here yesterday, then they could be in Tanglagan tomorrow. We shouldn't even stay here. It is too dangerous.”

As much as I hated the idea, I agreed to leave with them the following day.

People had begun to stir, but I was still pretending to sleep when I heard a truck rumble into the clearing in front of the house. One of my Agta friends rushed outside and convinced the drivers to wait until we had a cup of coffee.

A 12-year-old girl, Shirley's oldest daughter, was coming with us. Agta kids of that age have a lot of freedom to choose where they want to live. It's useful for finding marriage partners.

We got in the back and the truck rattled down the path a few hundred yards, where we had to get out. The road was blocked by a load of 4 x 4s, each 15 feet long. A dozen men aided by ponderous water buffalo pulled each piece of wood out of the road and loaded it onto our truck.

The vehicle, gears grinding, finally started across the river and down the road with the Agta family and me stacked precariously atop the boards. The truck soon stopped again, and we scrambled down and watched as men threw sacks of unmilled rice over the lumber. We climbed on top of the

sacks, and our truck lurched forward again.

I thought that this must be what it would feel like to ride on the back of a massive elephant. Our wobbly vehicle halted half a dozen times to pick up new passengers, who joined us on the lumpy rice sacks until we were so crowded together that the last passengers had to crawl over us and onto the truck's cab, and we all slammed into one another with every rut in the path.

"Buffalo's wife!" Shirley screamed when it appeared we might all tumble into a stream, and "Mother-in-law!" when we hit a jarring bump, until we finally made it back to town. I gave the friendly Agta family some money and caught a quiet jeep back to Santa Ana.

When I'd slept off my latest adventure, I decided to make a day trip to visit a local Agta community that spoke a different language—the camp I had visited on my first day in Santa Ana. I left the house early in a drizzling rain, and when the tricycle dropped me on the side of the road I walked the last quarter mile through the rice fields.

I opened my umbrella, but the rain picked up and began to blow sideways under it until my pants, shoes, feet, shirt, and face were soaked. I saw clapboard houses with corrugated tin roofs across a small, violent river, and I waved at a young woman before teetering over a rough-cut, wet log that functioned as a bridge. I took refuge under the eaves of a small house, and, breathing heavily, explained my purpose to a group of incredulous teenage girls.

"You shouldn't have come today. It's raining really hard." One girl told me the obvious but led me to the hut of Oscar, the community leader and one of the first Agta I spoke with when I arrived in Santa Ana.

"Oh, it's so good to have you here in our humble home. You are so wet. Let me get you some dry clothes." Oscar's sister-in-law fawned over me, and before I could protest, she had shoved clothes in my hands. I put on the dry clothes, a size too small.

Once she was satisfied that I would survive the wet and cold, she asked, "Aren't you the one who almost died?"

"Uh, who told you that?"

"I heard there was a kidnapper loose trying to kill you."

I realized then that the story of the Treasurer Hunter stalking me must have spread from Agta community to Agta community, even across language barriers.

Once the men decided it was too rainy to do any real work for the day, I had three informants ready to work.

"So, you guys all speak Labin Agta? Do you all speak the same way?"

"Oh, yes," they each assured me. There was a short, 60-page picture

dictionary of Labin Agta published by missionaries in the 1950s, but I wanted to be sure that the dictionary was accurate. By the time we hit page twelve of my list, differences began to emerge.

“Well, they say *darag* for ‘red’ where Oscar is from, but we say *daggang*.” Suddenly, there were two versions of almost every word. I forged ahead, noting differences. I was very glad that I had the dictionary as a basis for comparison.

After lunch, I changed back into my own clothes and Oscar’s sister-in-law asked when I would be going home. Later in the afternoon, I told them. I couldn’t check the time because my phone had gotten waterlogged in that morning’s torrential rain. She assured me that there would be no more vehicles that day.

I wanted to call Bill and Eden to tell them I hadn’t been kidnapped, but with no working phone, I was stuck. I settled in to get a bit more translation done, but darkness crept upon us until we sat in the room in the black night listening to the pattering rain on the roof. A cousin brought a small gas lamp that spread its yellow light in a round pattern on the floor.

After dinner, the entire community gathered in Oscar’s hut, and his sister-in-law asked shyly, “Would you like to see a piece of our culture sometime, sister?”

I said I would, and metal drums bearing a striking resemblance to frying pans emerged from the darkened walls. Oscar and two other men began to pound on them while everyone else looked around hopefully for the first dancer.

An old woman stood up on the raised wooden floor and hopped on one foot, arms extended as though she would take flight, her hands nearly touching the ceiling of Oscar’s little hut. Then she switched to the other foot while the crowd cheered and clapped and laughed. Another dancer took her place, and another, until finally the old folks pushed the young onto the dance floor and an unsure teenage boy hopped around obligingly. Everyone cheered until there were no more dancers, and then someone brought out a guitar.

They sang Christian songs in Labin Agta, and I hummed along with them, not knowing the words in any language—a byproduct of my non-Christian upbringing—and I had a grand time. My hosts and I listened quietly until the lateness began to overtake us and the crowd dwindled. Pillows, sleeping mats, and a mosquito net appeared from the dark rear of the hut.

I left early in the morning, accompanying a girl on her way to high school.

“So, you go to the private Catholic school?” I asked, noting the brown uniform. Public-school kids wore blue.

“Yes, I’m on scholarship.” She must have been the only Agta in the

whole school. She told me that when her family moved to Santa Ana the nuns began to teach weekend literacy classes, she excelled, so they offered her free tuition. She had taken five years off from classes, a junior now at 20.

“How come you didn’t get married?” She was quite old for a single Agta woman.

“No, I’m not ready to have babies. I want to finish high school first. I couldn’t go to school with kids. Anyway, I’m going to go to college. I’m sure I can find someone to pay my tuition. I’ll study nursing.”

I asked why, and she became quite animated.

“There’s always a job in nursing, and it pays well, so I can support my family. With nursing you can always work abroad if you want to.”

We ran, two students in their twenties, matching each other stride for stride to catch a tricycle on the main road. The vehicle was already packed with young kids in blue and brown uniforms, and we squeezed in.

28 PANIC IN SANTA ANA

A slim Agta girl and I waited in the shade of a coconut tree near city hall. Ed soon appeared in the doorway of the one-story building.

“Hey, you should send Landon and some guys down to pick up all the soap I have for you,” he told the girl. “The folks from everywhere else already got theirs.”

“Landon has been...busy.” The girl stared at the mountains on the horizon as if she could conjure up the man by doing so.

As we walked away, she said, “We elect him president, but he’s so busy harvesting trees that he doesn’t have time to get our free soap.” The Agta may have gone tens of thousands of years without chiefs or leaders of any kind, but they were getting the hang of democracy quickly.

She soon disappeared into a crowd near the vegetable stands in the central market, and I waited for my appointment with a woman who spoke the Itawit language—Jason and I had discussed over text the need to get our word list translated into that language—but the woman never showed.

JJ, the Jehovah’s Witness boy, saw me hanging about and offered to take me to her house. He led me past a tiny bar, a tailor, a watch repairman with a glass in his eye in a shop so dark I could barely make out his face, another bar with a female proprietor sitting alone on a stool, and then we were out of the market.

We took a plank bridge over the river, which at this time of year was mostly sludge, passed heaps of trash and a few cows, and ducked under a broken fence board that swung up like a garage door. A few run-down shacks, their plastic-tarp roofs caving in, stood guard over a legion of turkeys, chickens, pigs and naked, listless children.

“Can I help you?” asked a tall, handsome, skinny young man with buck teeth, clearly embarrassed that the town White Woman was standing in front of his humble home.

“We’re looking for your mom. She wants to interview her,” JJ told him.

The young man went to find his mother while an older man started pumping water from a well.

“These your turkeys?” I asked, well aware that there would be no glut of butterballs available for the upcoming Thanksgiving.

“Yup, she’s a beauty, isn’t she? Look how fat she is.”

“You wanna sell her?”

“Nope.”

“Oh, do you guys eat the eggs?”

“Nope.”

“You eat the meat?”

“Nope.”

Finding a Thanksgiving turkey might prove a lot harder than I had hoped.

“Sorry, I forgot about our meeting,” said the boy’s strong-looking mother as she came out to greet me. She was apologetic but not deferent as she wiped her hands on her apron then invited me to sit on a bench.

“So, you speak Itawit?” I asked.

“Well, we’re Malaweg, but my ex-husband spoke Itawit, so I speak it now.”

My ears perked up when she said Malaweg, a language I had never heard of—virgin territory for this linguistic explorer. But I had come to work on Itawit, and was disappointed to learn that the woman was not a native speaker.

Ever since Noam Chomsky revolutionized the way linguistics was conducted in the 1950s, emphasizing theory and stigmatizing field work, linguists have shunned non-native speakers as useless, believing they could not speak a language properly. That was one of Chomsky’s theories. But in the Philippines, where it’s not unusual for someone to become fluent in a language because that’s what their basketball partner spoke, the distinction between native speakers and non-native speakers was seriously blurred. Stuck in my Chomskyan rut, I set out to find another Itawit speaker, but made a mental note to talk with this woman in the future about Malaweg.

The next day the town pharmacist offered, “My auntie in Tuguegarao speaks Itawit, and she stays at home all day with nothing to do.” I grabbed a bus and in a few hours was standing in front of St. Paul’s college in Tuguegarao. Throngs of high-school kids in gray shirts and gray pants or skirts crammed the sidewalk and lingered around a few Internet cafes as they sipped from straws stuck in long, skinny plastic bags full of milky fresh coconut juice.

A slender woman, carrying a full-sized umbrella to block the sun and dressed in the snappy black pants and blue blouse of a government worker, rounded the corner. She hailed me.

“Are you Laura?”

I smiled and shook her hand. We made chit-chat as she led me away from the crowds and the tricycles, and in a few blocks we stopped at a driveway with a bright red wagon, “Mr. Burger” emblazoned in white letters on its side, parked on its cracked concrete surface. Auto parts were strewn about, and a group of older women sat around a small wooden table on a lawn that was more dirt than grass, heads bent together in the universal pose of gossip.

They stood up, waiting to be introduced to the foreigner, and my host dutifully obliged while the women began to conspire in Ilokano about which of their nephews would marry me. It was quite a problem, since there were so many nephews and only one eligible American woman in the entire city. I was led into a two-story wooden home. Its paint was fading but the structure was sound. It had a large concrete living room and dining room that were filled with rattan furniture. A wrinkled old lady had been sweeping in preparation for my visit.

“Hello, honored guest. How are you?” she started in Tagalog, before switching back into the more comfortable Ilokano, “Welcome to my home.” She put away her broom.

“Mom, I’m going back to work now, can you sit with Laura and teach her Itawit?”

“Oh, no, I couldn’t do that. I don’t remember how to speak Itawit. I just speak Ilokano all day.”

The old woman, all in black, wouldn’t be cajoled into letting me interview her, but she was more than happy to teach me words in Itawit as long as my pens were safely tucked away in my bag. My memory for a new language was not nearly that good, so I bid farewell to the nice lady.

“You could interview my nephew, he speaks Itawit,” offered one old gossip in the front yard as the others smiled and winked.

“Oh, but he works all day,” she recanted when I explained how long the interview was.

Another said, “My uncle can speak it. But he lives in Amalung, and there’s nobody to take you there.”

“I could travel there myself. It’s no problem,” I suggested, eager to find an Itawit informant.

“Hmnn.” Clearly that was the end of that.

After insisting that I was able to wander around Tuguegarao on my own, I escaped the gossipers and their nuptial dreams and made my way to the immigration office.

“This is my last visa extension. I leave December 2.” I tried not to gloat.

“We need a copy of your plane ticket, two passport photos and 3,000 pesos,” the blasé young receptionist told me as she gazed at her manicure. I pulled my unpainted nails from the counter and wondered if a visitor would

have to remain in the Philippines forever if she didn't have the cash. Her boss, when I interrupted him in his game of computer solitaire, told me he could give me the visa without the plane ticket if I promised that the flight was on December 2. I assured him that it was.

I sat in the camera shop with high-school kids and young couples waiting for their glamour shots and then returned to the immigration office with two color photographs that made me look like an American ghost because the camera was permanently set to lighten everyone's skin tone a few extra shades.

My exit papers in hand, I walked down a teeming street, passing a concrete Catholic church advertising salvation for those attending this Sunday's service, and found the house behind the burger stand. The whole friendly family of a mother, father, two daughters—one starting college and one finishing—granny, and an unmarried aunt greeted me, as had so many others in the Philippines, as if I were a returning family member rather than an American student referred by a friend.

"You know," said Arnold, the father, when he heard I had no Itawit language consultant, "most of the people in my office are Itawit. You could just do your interview there tomorrow."

"It's really long, and I might need two people for the whole day."

"That's all right, I'm sure the boss won't mind."

We arrived at Arnold's office before the morning rush, so Arnold showed me to a spacious room with rows of ornate wooden desks overlooking a vibrant lawn and beyond that, the buildings of the city. Employees began trickling in, and Arnold proudly introduced me to each one, announcing, "She's staying at my house."

The word lists soon came out, and two of the men sat with me and translated.

"Jesus, what's the Itawit word for 'throat?'" one of the men shouted across the room.

"*Karalong*," came the answer from somewhere behind us. The first man drifted away, then the other, until I found myself with the young man named Jesus, who shouted, "Jun, what's Itawit for 'snore?'"

My informants came and went, being sure to always leave me with someone to answer my never-ending questions, until Arnold gently protested that it was time to go home. I would have to come back for a second day. On our way out, we were stopped by a tall, round man from another division who hadn't met me yet.

"Arnold, who's this? What is she doing?"

"She's our American friend. You can ask her. She speaks Tagalog."

The man looked at me as if I were the product of a laboratory experiment.

"You speak Tagalog?" He didn't wait for my answer. "Have you ever

seen an Indian-head American nickel?”

When I admitted that I had not, he removed the coin from his pocket and rested it in the palm of his hand like a priest holding a communion wafer and launched into a brief history of this particular nickel. When he finished, he asked if I had any American coins to donate to his collection.

I was once again grateful to Arnold, this time for saying that we had to go home.

Back at home the granny quizzed me on my newfound knowledge of Itawit. I insisted that I wrote the words down and couldn't memorize the language in one day, but she wasn't listening, so I rattled off the handful of words I could remember.

“*Kofun* is ‘friend’ and *bangngag* is ‘deaf,’” I told her, and she nodded happily.

We watched the national news on TV while waiting for dinner. There was a storm headed for the northern Philippines. A map flashed up that showed a signal-four typhoon and a big red arrow that pointed directly at a black dot named Tuguegarao. In the southern Pacific, the word “typhoon” is used to describe what Americans call hurricanes. I couldn't have been more concerned if the arrow had pointed to a picture of Arnold's house.

“It shouldn't affect the weather in Manila,” the reporter said as the newscast moved on.

The next morning I went back to the office with Arnold to finish collecting data on Itawit. I was done in about an hour, but I had a trick up my sleeve. I had ordered chow mien from the food stand and soon the five-pound bowl arrived with paper plates and plastic forks. Chow mien is the standard party food for birthdays and celebrations, and the office staff was pleased.

“Thank you for coming here,” I heard, and “We are so grateful that you visited our office.” My personal favorite: “It's so great you came. If you hadn't come, we wouldn't have this chow mien!” We sat and chatted, and I fielded things like “I have a cousin, he lives in New Jersey, maybe you know him.”

After lunch, I said my good-byes and made my way to the mall to go shopping. I had to give a professional presentation at a conference in Sydney, Australia in a few weeks, and the only clothes I had were stained cargo pants and T-shirts. It was to be my last day in Tuguegarao, my last chance at the big city. I would only be in Manila for a few hours in transit to Australia.

I took the opportunity to harass the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples one last time for the census data they had been promising for months.

“You're in luck,” said the director as he sent one underling for a stack of papers and another for coffee and fried bananas. I was skeptical, but as I sat

across from his messy desk and leafed through the papers, I saw the names, ages, familial relationships, and, most importantly, the ethnic groups that corresponded to the languages of all the individuals who lived in areas with pending applications for Certificates of Ancestral Domain for land. It wasn't complete—it didn't include Santa Ana—but for the first time, the NCIP had provided me with useful data. I thanked them for the coffee and the tasty fried banana, bid farewell, hopped onto the next air-conditioned bus, and beat the storm back to Santa Ana.

I was hanging my laundry on the line outside my guesthouse room when I got a text message. It was a tricycle driver I had met on my trip with Shirley. He was going to take me to Tanglagan, where the very fluent Agta woman was from.

River Xable, but road 2 muddy 2 drive.

How far? Could I walk?

No Its 2 far. 50 km. Fifty kilometers would put me into the Pacific. The text continued, *Almost out of money on cell fone. Can U send some?* I forwarded ten pesos of credit, enough for ten more text messages. A few minutes later my phone beeped and I flipped it open.

Thank U for credit. U no its possible 4 Filipinos and Americans 2 marry? My first text-message marriage proposal. I didn't reply.

I decided to find the speaker of Malaweg. When I got to her house she had just returned from a long morning full of baking pastries for Jotay Resort, Bill and Eden's rival, and she looked tired as she set her youngest child down for a nap on a pile of dingy clothes. She listlessly answered my questions and asked if she could do a load of laundry to keep her mind occupied. I would normally look for someone who was as interested in the work as I was, but she was the only speaker of Malaweg in town, and I agreed. When we took a break, I mentioned that I would be gone for a few days to do some research in Tanglagan.

"I wouldn't go to Tanglagan if I was you." She looked at me very seriously. "There's NPA there. I know about NPA. My ex-husband was in the NPA. I was in the NPA. That's why I left him. I couldn't take the lies anymore. I couldn't stand all the terrible things he was doing. Tanglagan isn't safe. Not for you. Not for anyone."

I decided not to go. I only had two weeks left in the Philippines. The Treasure Hunter had faded away, I wasn't ready to take any more chances. As the sun began to set, I excused myself and shoved some pesos into her hands. She refused but I insisted and she thanked me, saying she would start saving up to buy a plastic tarp to replace her leaky thatched roof.

That night Reynalyn, who worked at the Internet shop, invited me to sing karaoke on the beach. The Norwegian, the only foreigner who lived full time in Santa Ana besides Bill, had built Jotay Resort and named it after his wife. It had open-air cabanas on the beach, powerful flood lights that

attracted mosquitoes as well as people, and a karaoke machine that took five-peso coins. His wife was out of town and his girlfriends were mad at him, so he invited half the barangay to free liquor and karaoke.

The road to the resort was crowded, and soon Reynalyn and I and dozens of others were filing onto the Norwegian's open-air patio as he turned on the revolving disco lights. Unlike American karaoke, where the music is mercifully loud to drown out the singers, Philippine karaoke machines turn the music way down and the vocals way up. Reynalyn asked me to sing, I said no, but everybody in the crowd cajoled and begged until I reluctantly agreed. It was Soul Asylum's "Runaway Train," and from that first line through the last, tone-deaf Laura made them all sorry that they'd asked.

The next day I headed back to Limbus, an Agta camp near Santa Ana. I avoided my hopeful bridegroom and found the tricycle driver who liked to help me create Ilokano sentences for translation. As our tricycle bounced along—I was the only passenger in the seat next to him—I asked for a sentence that began with the word "how."

He was quiet for so long that I thought he had forgotten, but then gave me, "How does the man with no arms wipe his ass?"

We turned onto a dirt road, but it was November—the rainy season—and the tricycle wheels began to spin. We were stuck in the mud after only a quarter mile. I wasn't sure if I could hike the two miles to the Agta camp with my fifty-pound backpack, but I didn't have anything else to do that day, and it was barely ten in the morning.

I wished I had packed fewer things when I set out, but the solitude was bliss. The hills were a brilliant green and a few farmers toiled rice fields, but there were no cars, nobody talking to me. I saw crows swooping down to steal bits of rice and heard their calls of triumph as they launched themselves back into the sky and became black specks against the white cotton clouds.

I called out to one of the farmers in Ilokano, "Is the river by the Agta camp crossable today after the rains?"

He looked confused, and answered me in Tagalog, "No, the river is too high." The poor farmer, recognizing me as an American, quickly mustered his confidence and seized his one opportunity for riches in golden America. He called back across his rice field, "Are you married? Do you have a cell phone? I'm still single."

"No, I don't have a phone."

I walked on and saw Miguel coming down the road, the second oldest Agta in Santa Ana, along with a young boy, both bent over carrying bundles on their backs. When they came up to me they placed the bundles on the ground to greet me, smiling.

Miguel said, "Hello, younger sister. Are you going up to the camp

today?”

“Yes. Is the river crossable?”

“It’s a little high, but we made it across. We are walking to town to sell this rattan. When you get to the river, just call out to the women. They’re not doing anything. They’re just washing clothes.”

When I arrived at the river it was forty feet wide, its clear water rushing by. I stood on a hill where the group of Agta women could see me, and they looked up from their washing. At my wave, they sprang into action. One woman grabbed an inner tube and four others waded into the river up to their armpits.

“Take off your bag,” one woman commanded. “We’ll put it on the inner tube.”

Before I could protest, she and her companions had wrested my backpack from me and taken it fifty yards upstream. I wished I had put my microphones in the waterproof bag instead of the five kilos of rice, but the inner tube with my precious electronic equipment was already floating across the river.

“Here, grab onto this rope,” another woman said. Soon, I was half-swimming, half-pulling myself across the river on the lifeline. Sometimes my feet touched the bottom—it was times like this that I wished I were taller—and sometimes the current was so strong that I could only pull myself with the rope, but I made it to the other side.

I was grateful for my expensive high-tech, fast-drying clothes. My backpack was still floating on the river as I wrung myself out, and I could see why they had started fifty yards upstream. The current was so strong that by the time the inner tube landed on the bank where I stood, we were only a few feet shy of the rocks that created a mini waterfall. But all was well—my microphones were dry, and so was the rice.

I worked with Landon, who squatted in the dirt clearing in front of his hut while I sat uncomfortably on a rock, checking the dictionary and grammar that I had spent so many months developing with Gregory. The president of the Santa Ana Agta found many excuses to take breaks: drinking coffee, a leisurely lunch, splitting rattan, and talking with an Ilokano woman from a neighboring farm who drifted by.

“Who’s the American?”

“Sister Laura.”

“Why didn’t you go out to work today?”

“I’m working with sister.” When the woman figured out I spoke Tagalog, she began to interrogate me with the usual questions, quickly getting to my favorite: “Is it true that in America your parents kick you out of the house when you turn 18?” Filipinos were generally appalled at this unthinkable inhumane cultural practice of their otherwise beloved Americans.

“Well, in my family, my parents said we either had to get a job or go to school if we wanted to live in their house. They didn’t want us to be lazy.” The response was what made this my favorite question. Those Filipinos who had jobs and supported unemployed brothers and sisters replied without fail: “That’s great. I wish we could do that here. There are so many lazy people, just mooching off their families. Here you don’t have to get a job if you don’t want one.”

The brothers and sisters and aunts and uncles who didn’t work replied, without fail, like the Ilokano neighbor: “That is so harsh. Well, you can only do that in America because it’s so easy to find a job there. Here in the Philippines, it’s very hard to find a job.” Then she said what everyone always said: “It would never work in the Philippines.”

Our uninvited guest would not go away, so I returned to the translations. I said in Ilokano, “The midwife cut the baby’s umbilical cord.”

“Hmnn, midwife,” Landon carefully pondered the Agta translation.

“You know, the woman who delivers babies, midwife,” my Ilokano inquisitor clarified what Landon already knew.

Landon nodded politely, “*Ginarsatna i partera he i pusad na tagibi ba.*”

The know-it-all Ilokano woman corrected his Agta, “*Ginilat i paltera i pused na beybi,*” and then peered over my shoulder to see if I had written down her corruption of Landon’s words. I wrote what Landon said, and she grunted.

“The child shot the sparrow with his slingshot.”

The woman laughed through her nose and added, “He, he, slingshot, you know,” she exaggerated a slingshot gesture.

Landon paused to politely watch her as if he had been confused but had now been set onto the correct track, and he gave me the translation.

She shook her head, peered at a distant rice field as if the answer lay there, and said some nonsense. This charade continued until she had to go home on account of the setting sun, but she promised to return with the early morning dew as a special favor to me.

Landon went to Santa Ana the next day, and the Agta and I hadn’t finished our morning coffee before our annoying friend was back.

“The entire town of Santa Ana is flooded,” she announced, flustered. She fiddled with a silent radio, but her batteries were dead.

“People from town have been fleeing into the hills. We met someone this morning who gave us the news. This is terrible. What are we going to do?” I suggested that we be grateful that we were in the mountains and not in town, but no one agreed.

I texted Ed and the reply came almost instantly: *Those are just rumors. Please assure everyone there has been no flooding.* I passed along the good news, but the throngs were not appeased. An Agta man named Kigut, with a narrow face and long limbs, fretted aloud.

“I hope my family is okay. Maybe I should go home to check on them. But I haven’t made much money since I came here. I was hoping to stay another day.” He had a six-hour walk ahead of him and nobody to walk with him. I texted Ed again: *We’ve been up here in the mountains with no radio and we don’t know what happened.*

Ed answered, *There was a tsunami watch last night but nothing happened. The panic came in the morning.*

After dinner, Kigut asked if I had a microphone. I hadn’t been recording because I only had so many sets of AA batteries. But Kigut was going to sing.

Only a handful of Agta still knew this art form of chanting with ancient words that most Agta did not understand. I pressed the button on the recorder, held the tiny machine in my palm, and gave Kigut the microphone. He bellowed out a sad verse in his deep, masculine voice, paused, explained that his song was about a group of hunters who were not having much luck, and bellowed out another melancholy verse. I only understood one phrase, “the Agta scattered.”

He ran out of breath and I thought his Agta song was over, but it wasn’t, and when he sang again I was saddened by his mournful sound. After the final verse he announced, “That’s it, sister,” then stopped me. “Before you turn it off, sister, remember us in the future when you return to your country.” I said I would, and pushed the button to stop recording.

When the mosquitoes had gone to sleep and only the crickets and the crackling of warm fire pierced the stillness of the night, Landon, who had returned from town, told Kigut and me the story of what happened yesterday.

A tsunami watch had come late in the evening. The great wave was predicted to arrive in Santa Ana around midnight. Ed, whose many duties included disaster coordinator, and other city staff began to notify their friends by text message, and soon everyone in Santa Ana with a cell phone knew of the tsunami warning. But nobody did anything. When it was past midnight, and the tsunami had failed to materialize, the watch was over.

But when all the Ilokano people went to market the next morning—those with cell phones and those without, those who loved to traffic in rumors and those who never listened to them—all heard about the tsunami warning, and people began to panic. The shopkeepers closed their shops, and that was it. If the shops were closed, Santa Ana must not be safe. Shopkeepers and shoppers, day laborers and unemployed, adults and children all raced for the tricycles and jammed into them. The tricycles rushed to and fro, men hanging off the tops, mothers clutching their crying children, their eyes wide with fear and all their worldly possessions tucked inside. The townspeople in the three-wheeled vehicles raced out of Santa Ana and toward the mountains, helter-skelter, up the sides of the hills,

MICROPHONE IN THE MUD

whether or not there were roads, wheels spinning in the mud, driving for tens of kilometers before they finally paused and turned to watch the calm, endless China Sea from the safety of their hillside retreats.

29 A BITTER-SWEET GOODBYE

Kigut had left for his home across the mountains and coffee had been served by the time I crawled out of my sleeping bag the next morning. Landon was starting to get into the groove of translating. Without the peanut gallery, he worked quickly and accurately. We breezed through one notebook, and when I pulled out a clean one, Landon was impressed with how much work we had done. Five notebooks full of Agta data didn't seem like much to me for a year's worth of labor, but opening a new notebook was always satisfying.

In the fading afternoon sun, when the rest of the men had returned from gathering rattan, Landon and I migrated to where a group of men and women were stripping the hard outer layer from the rattan. We translated slowly and joked with everyone. They were glad that the day's intake of rattan was good and that the annoying Ilokano woman had gone home for the day.

"Sometimes *ugden* say silly things," one man laughed. "It's good just to have Agta around."

"But I'm an *ugden*," I pointed out.

"You're not an *ugden*, you're Agta. You speak Agta," the man said, and everyone nodded. We all laughed.

That night the women had a surprise for me: a three-foot-long monitor lizard for dinner. Gregory's brother Unday had caught one for me weeks before and brought it to my boarding house, but I had been traveling that day, so he had sold it to a man in the market. Now was my chance. The women chopped the creature into chunks and cooked it with MSG and other spices. At dinner, everyone waited for my opinion, and politeness be damned, I told the truth: It was delicious, like chicken with MSG on it.

That was my last night sleeping in the mountains. In the morning I gave away my extra clothes and medicines and walked up the hill to say good-bye

to my favorite older couple, Unday and his wife Nagi. They had moved here to escape the NPA.

Unday did not look well. "He's sick, I think he has malaria," Nagi told me in her raspy voice.

"I'm just cold and weak." Unday's voice shook and he looked terrible. I gave him my sleeping bag, and he shivered as he wrapped himself in it.

"We're going to go to town with you to take him to the hospital," said Nagi, and he didn't protest. Half an hour later, Unday, Nagi, Landon and I were crossing the river toward town.

The river that I had to pull myself across with a rope a few days earlier now barely reached my knees. My bag was light, having been relieved of everything but my notebooks and microphones, and I walked easily in the light drizzle. We passed a few farmers toiling in the rice fields, and they paused and called out. Landon, walking in front, turned and gave me a conspiratorial smile.

"You didn't hear that?"

"Oh, you mean the farmers staring and yelling 'Hey, American?' I barely notice it anymore."

We sat on the damp grass along the main road for a half an hour, which stretched into an hour before we got a jeep into town. Landon, the president of the Santa Ana Agta, had to sit on the roof, and I missed my opportunity to slip him some cash for his services, but I knew I would get another chance. In town, Landon jumped off and headed in the opposite direction. Unday and Nagi walked slowly toward the hospital, and I went home to take a shower. When I arrived at the hospital nearly an hour later, they were still sitting outside waiting to see the doctor, so I dragged them up to the nurse's station with me, where I could see that the racist doctor was on rotation. She ignored the Agta but smiled at me as I sat Unday down in the solitary orange plastic chair.

"What seems to be the problem?" the doctor asked, her lacquered hair perfectly framing her square face.

"He's going deaf. You'll have to speak up. He's had a fever for a few days," his wife replied.

"Have you taken anything?" the physician shouted.

"Whiskey," he muttered, misunderstanding the question.

The doctor turned theatrically to her audience, the hospital staff. She raised her arms and delivered her rhythmical line: "Don't drink so much, old man."

The nurses laughed and the doctor couldn't help smiling at her own wit.

"He had two Tylenol," I said flatly.

Without taking his temperature or touching him or asking any further questions the physician pronounced her professional diagnosis: "He's fine. Give him a prescription for extra-strength Tylenol." A nurse wrote it down

and handed the sheet of paper to me. It was Saturday and nobody was at City Hall to provide financial assistance, so we went to the market and I bought them medicine, coffee, and fried bananas and mango juice from a stall and bid them good-bye.

I worked with Gregory on Tuesday translating Agta stories in the boarding-house cabana. He was not scheduled to work with me on Wednesday, so I visited the ex-NPA woman who spoke Malaweg, and she spent the afternoon helping me with vocabulary and sentences between nursing her baby and discussing the sale of ducks with her neighbors. She found the work boring, but was happy with the small amount of cash I gave her, so she was disappointed to hear that I wouldn't be coming back that Thursday.

"It's a big American holiday," I said.

Her neighbor explained helpfully, "They're not Christian in America, so this is like Christmas for them."

I promised I would return on Friday to continue work on the language.

My friend Reynalyn, the assistant in Bill and Eden's Two Angels cell phone/Internet shop, went to get our turkey early Thanksgiving morning. Although there were turkeys everywhere, nobody seemed to want to part with one, so she was going back to her hometown to buy a turkey from a friend. The expedition was to take the entire morning. Eden was still recovering from a reaction to a new medication, but in the name of Thanksgiving she was manning the town's only modern communication store while Bill and I defended a plate full of bread crumbs from the cats as they dried in the sun on the flat top of his Hummer.

One advantage for Americans living in the Philippines is that we can do our shopping for Thanksgiving food on Thanksgiving Day. I went to the market to buy beer, corn, cinnamon, and apples, but was dismayed to find that corn was out of season and the word *canela*, which meant "cinnamon" in Spanish, seemed to have acquired the meaning "bay leaves" in Ilokano, so that the filling for my apple pie would consist exclusively of apples and sugar. We had no mushrooms, celery, or chestnuts for our turkey stuffing, so the two Americans living in Santa Ana added carrots and bell peppers and hoped for the best.

Reynalyn showed up around noon with a large box and set it down on the counter. I went to open it.

"Watch out! The turkey is alive," she said, just in time.

"No way I'm gonna to kill a turkey." Bill was agitated. "I'm not hungry anymore." Reynalyn, the maid, and I dragged the squawking bird out of the kitchen as Bill continued to complain, "I'm just gonna eat stuffin."

We crossed the street to the gravel driveway of the maid's house. I held the turkey's leg and she deftly slit its throat, bright red blood staining the gravel. A large pot of water was placed on a small earth oven and when it boiled, she dropped the turkey in the clear bubbling liquid to make the skin tender so we could remove its feathers. We worked as a pretty good team, but when it was de-feathered, this turkey was no larger than a big chicken. It was going to be a small Thanksgiving dinner for Bill and Eden and their two angels, Reynalyn, the maid, Eric, Eden's sister and brother-in-law and their five hungry children. The maid pulled out a sharp cleaver, and I barely stopped her before she hacked the turkey to bits.

"We're going to cook it whole," I told her.

She looked at me like I was crazy, but I was an American and she was familiar with our strange customs, so she put the cleaver away. When Bill saw the denuded turkey, he relented and began to stuff it.

"That's one small turkey," he offered as he put it in the oven.

I went to find out if the gas station over by city hall was selling fish or ice cream out of their freezer that week. I was lucky to find it full of ice cream, and settled on "Frutti Tutti" as the only flavor that could go with apple pie. I bought sodas and made cookies and garlic bread in the microwave. The crowd began to gather as the turkey was removed from the oven and the table was set.

"Don't forget the gravy," Bill said. It was the first time I had been informed that this was my duty. Making the gravy was my Thanksgiving job when I was growing up, but I had had a partner then.

"I don't know how to make gravy anymore," my ancient, cheerful grandmother insisted every Thanksgiving, "I'm too old. I forgot how." But when I pulled out the pan with the drippings and got a bag of flour, her instincts would swing into action.

"Make sure to scrape all that brown stuff off the bottom of the pan," she said, and laughed, "No, no, that's too much flour," until the tiny lady, barely ninety pounds and ninety-plus years old, had usurped the fork and spun her magic and it was always great.

But I didn't know how to make the gravy when there was three inches of fat on the bottom of the pan. I added flour, then salt, then flour, until the whole thing was an inedible goey mass.

"We're not having gravy," I announced to Bill, and he agreed when he saw the mess I had made. When we sat down the table looked beautiful, and the whole gang was waiting for me to say something, perhaps grace, and waiting for me to start, and as I pulled off a leg and placed it on my plate everyone dug in, until someone stopped.

"Where's the rice?"

"We didn't make any. It's an American holiday. We don't eat rice for Thanksgiving. Have some mashed potatoes."

Everyone except Bill and I was disappointed as they gathered stuffing and turkey and mashed potatoes onto their plates and began. I have eaten many turkeys in my life, at Thanksgivings, Christmases, and random Sunday dinners, but this was by far the worst turkey I had ever tasted. Clearly accustomed to serious exercise, the old bird was stringy and tough. Nick-Nick, the young nephew, now nearly three years old, seemed to be the only one enjoying it. Even though he didn't eat chicken, he asked for seconds of the turkey and then ran around the patio hold a turkey leg, yelling, "Turkey! Turkey! Turkey! Turkey!"

I opened a beer and the children seemed to expect instant inebriation, asking me every few minutes if I was drunk yet. I served myself a small piece of the apple pie and put a dollop of ice cream on top, and an invisible taboo was lifted, as suddenly everyone went for the ice cream. Bill took a bite of the apple pie, and we were surprised how good it was. I sat on the porch drinking my beer until the dessert had been devoured, the pathetic turkey carcass disposed of, and the remaining ice cream stored in the freezer.

"Next year I'll send you a few boxes of stove-top stuffing," I promised.

"But we still won't have a good turkey," Bill lamented.

"Just buy one and raise it yourself," I suggested. "You can make sure it gets good and fat by November."

"But then I won't be able to eat it. I was born on a farm, but I'm gettin' too old for killin' animals."

The next morning I set out a jar of instant coffee, sugar, a thermos of hot water, a liter container filled with water—not too cold, because Gregory didn't like drinking cold water—and waited in the cabana for him to appear. I eventually decided he had forgotten, and I packed it all back up and went inside to continue compiling the dictionary on my laptop.

It was nearly lunchtime when the maid told me I had a visitor. It was Gregory. I grabbed my notebooks, greeted him, and set out to work.

"I'm thirsty, do you have some water?" he asked. I obliged with water and glasses and began translating. We hadn't gotten through twenty sentences when Gregory asked for coffee. Again I obliged, bringing the thermos and mugs back outside to the cabana. After a few sentences translating a story that Kigut had told me about two pairs of siblings from different towns, Gregory stopped.

"Do you think I could get part of my salary early to go buy some betel nut?" I obliged with a ten-peso coin and sat looking over the translations until he returned ten minutes later with a mouth already stained red.

"I'm hungry. Can we have some lunch?" We ate, and got through a bit

more translating before Gregory announced that he was going home for the day.

“The baby is sick. Can you buy us some medicine for him?” He wanted me to give him cash, but I accompanied him to the pharmacy.

“What’s the problem?” the pharmacist asked.

Gregory looked at me. “Tell her what you need,” I urged him in Agta.

“Uh, my baby is sick,” he answered sheepishly.

“What are the symptoms?”

“Uh, coughing.”

“How old is the baby?”

Gregory gave me a helpless look. I answered, “Six months,” knowing that Gregory had not kept track. I paid for the medicine and gave Gregory his salary for the day, minus the ten pesos.

He asked for extra money for the tricycle fare. I calmly replied in Agta so that the market would not understand our conversation, “You showed up late and are leaving early and hardly did any work, and I am still paying you the full salary for the day. So no, I’m not going to give you any extra money for the tricycle.”

He muttered that that seemed fair and sulked away.

The next day he came early and stayed all day, working hard for his money, and we were able to translate two very long Agta stories, filling up the better part of a small notebook. It was a successful day’s work and I was very pleased. When we finished, he got his pay, and I watched him walk with a world-weary gait down the dirt road toward the central market, a small, dark man wearing a Hawai’i T-shirt. Some people are not very good at good-byes.

I never saw Gregory again.

I only had a few days remaining in Santa Ana and as I sat in the shade of the guesthouse cabana drinking a bottle of the iced tea that Eric stocked for me in his refrigerator, I thought about what I had accomplished in the Philippines.

I had documented the Dupaningan Agta language, including recordings and videos of sentences, stories, songs, and translations in Ilokano and English, and sent it all electronically to Australia, where it was digitally archived and will be saved, along with similar data on other endangered languages from the Pacific Islands and Australia, forever. I would complete my dictionary and grammar back in Hawai’i and when they were finished, I would send them, too, to Australia.

I would also send ten bound copies of my dictionary to Taniel to distribute to his Agta friends who could read. I had notebooks and CDs

and dictionaries—twenty kilos and eleven months of my life went into the cardboard box I was filling up in my room. It was good to know that my research had been substantial enough to warrant an overweight-baggage charge from the airline, all without being kidnapped.

Working alone and with Jason on our trip down the coast, I had recorded and written down hundreds of vocabulary words and scores of sentences and phrases each of Umiray Dumaguete, Alta, Casiguran Agta, Kasiguranin, Pahanan, Pahanan Agta, Dinapigui Agta, Nagtipunan Agta, Ibanag, Itawit, Labin Agta, and Malaweg, most of which had been previously unknown to linguists beyond the names and locations of the languages.

There are 7,000 languages on our planet, and more than half of them may become extinct during this century. Would my work help save Dupanangan Agta and the other languages Jason and I worked on? The Agta people didn't know what a digital archive was, and couldn't locate Australia on a map. Few if any of them can read my dictionary. But I found that once they realized that the languages were endangered, the Agta people had a strong will to save them, and that is an important first step.

I pictured in my mind one of the Agta children or one of their children, years from now, fully grown, perhaps a business person or a lawyer or a doctor. She would speak Ilokano and maybe English, and some Agta or maybe none, and like an adopted child searching out her birth parents, might come upon my research and use it to relearn the Agta language. She might be able to read the Agta stories, the Agta songs, the Agta culture, and then teach her sisters and brothers.

Something like that was already happening with the Manx language on the Isle of Man, with the Miami language in Florida, with the Tlingit language in Alaska, and...

Landon appeared, interrupting my fantasy, and asked for money. I paid him for the previous week's work, and we got around to discussing my plan to buy a water buffalo for the Agta of Santa Clara, the real reason for his visit.

Since Landon was the president of the Santa Ana Agta, he naturally expected to be able to maneuver the gift for his own personal use. I told him I would send the money after the Agta had a meeting to discuss what they wanted. They could buy a water buffalo or could choose to buy something else, like a well. Landon said he understood, and he left. After I returned to America, it took Ed a year and a half to get the Agta to organize that meeting, but they finally did and got their water buffalo.



FIGURE 12 ED (SECOND FROM RIGHT) AND THE SANTA ANA AGTA WITH THEIR BUFFALO

I had one more language to finish. I hustled out of the guesthouse gate and down the road, late for a meeting with the lady who spoke Malaweg. But Ana Maria was feeding the pigs when I arrived, and wasn't able to work. When I returned home along the dusty lane near my guesthouse, I saw a small dark figure by the gate. As I got near I recognized Nagi, drunk and crying uncontrollably.

Between sobs she got out, "It's Unday, sister, the hospital," and started to cry again. She tried to explain, "Malaria, the doctor..." She couldn't continue.

"Let's go see him, and I'll talk to the doctor." I hugged her and took her arm, and we started in the direction of the hospital.

"Wait, I've got to get something." She stumbled away from me and toward a small storefront. I followed in time to see her pull a half-pint bottle of gin she had stashed behind the counter, and the shopkeeper looked at me as if to say, "Oh, these Agta, what are you going to do?"

Unday was sitting on a bed with no sheets, spitting betel-nut juice out the window just below the sign he couldn't read that said, "No spitting out the window."

I asked the nurses when the doctor would be in, and they reported curtly, "The doctor's shift doesn't begin for hours," so we sat and waited while Unday curled up in my sleeping bag and shivered.

I heard the doctor in the hall and went out to greet him. I was relieved he was one of the competent young physicians from Manila.

“Are you going to go see Unday now?” I asked.

“Has he bathed yet?” one of the nurses interjected, but the doctor ignored her and went into Unday’s room. He was the only patient. It took the physician no more than thirty seconds to make a diagnosis: malaria.

The next morning the nurses reported that Unday’s fever was down, and the good doctor told me he had started Unday on a regimen of quinine. I went into their hospital room, where Unday and Nagi simply stared out the window. I lent them a miniature digital recorder that Gregory had borrowed from time to time, usually to make recordings of people playing and laughing, but with a few of his songs and stories that I had recorded. There were a lot of buttons, and Unday and Nagi were even less familiar with technology than Gregory, so I showed them where the on/off switch was and how to press play and stop.

“Thank you, thank you so much, this is wonderful.” I thought they might cry.

When I went to the Malaweg consultant for my afternoon session, there was a well-dressed young man there who looked like he didn’t belong in Santa Ana. A few minutes’ investigation revealed he was a missionary, and Ana Maria was pleased to send him away on account of her prior commitment with me. We finished every last sentence I had prepared, and even though I had thought she might fall asleep in the middle of one of my sentences, she said she was sad to see me go.

I headed back to the hospital and passed a young kid I had never seen before, who stared at me. I thought, “I’m Laura, and I live in this town.”

I entered the one-story, concrete hospital and found Unday and Nagi staring out the window again.

“What happened to the recorder?” I asked, and saw that it was there by the side of the bed.

“We listened to the whole thing. It was wonderful. Can you make it play the ones where Gregory tells stories and sings? He remembers them so well. He’s so good.” Nagi held the recorder out to me like an offering. They didn’t know how to rewind, so I taught them.

Leaving was a surprisingly bittersweet week of good-byes. The last night, I treated some of my friends to beer: Ed, Reynalyn, the maid, and Eric. Eden and Bill didn’t drink beer, so they didn’t come. Ed and I laughed about how scared I had been in Tuguegarao, and how he had suggested I buy a hat and get a haircut to disguise myself. Reynalyn reminded me how little Tagalog I had spoken when I arrived. But mostly we drank our beer, and I avoided the deep-fried intestines.

Ed said he would come by the next day to see me off, but he didn’t.

On my final morning, the remnants of my belongings fit into the same large purple backpack I had arrived with, and my books and notebooks were crammed into the cardboard box weighing twenty kilos. I gave Eden a big good-bye hug in the kitchen, and then Bill helped me load the box into the backseat of his Hummer.

Bill drove me to the central market and waited at his dial-up Internet shop so I could say good-bye to Reynalyn. When she arrived, he told her not to open the store and to come with us to the bus stop, but she insisted on working to avoid a drawn-out good-bye.

We took the Hummer the hundred yards to the bus stop so I wouldn't have to carry my stuff, and waited. In a few minutes, the first-class bus arrived. Bill picked up my heavy box, slid it into the storage space on the side of the bus, and muttered that I'd have to re-tape the box in Manila. With those words, he turned his face away so that I wouldn't see him get misty-eyed, and I turned away so that he wouldn't see the tears in my eyes either.

I got on the bus and Bill drove away, and as the bus began to roll, the vendors in the Centro came to the fronts of their shops and waved good-bye to me. They had given me Ilokano sentences for Gregory to translate; they had tried to protect me when I was in danger. They were my friends, and I waved back to every single one of them.

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When I first arrived in the Philippines, I was a 25 year old graduate student trying to gather data for a Ph.D. dissertation. It was my first visit to the Philippines, and my hold on local languages and culture was shaky. I met many remarkable, friendly, and generous people there. I could not have written *Microphone in the Mud* without them.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to the Dupanangan Agta people, the speakers of the language I was documenting. I found the Agta to be intelligent, patient, humorous, kind, and very supportive of my research. For privacy purposes I changed the names of the Agta in this book, so I shall thank them by their pseudonyms. Gregory, my primary language consultant, was a very talented teacher of his language. My work could not have been successful without his dedication to that difficult job. But there were many other Agta who worked with me. Taniel, Gregory's brother-in-law and one of the few literate Agta, was also a valuable teacher. Landon, the president of the Santa Ana Agta, loved to teach me obscure vocabulary. Tabuk shared his beautiful songs. Dalang, Cesar, and the many Agta from outside of Santa Ana shared stories and taught me their dialects of Agta.

But it was not just language the Agta shared. They shared their lives and were very hospitable hosts. Thanks to Sisi, Gregory's wife, for tirelessly hosting me in her home, to Misteen, Taniel's wife, for hosting me in her home even when she was quite ill, to Rudy and Amelia for their friendship and hospitality, to Unday and Nagi for treating me like a daughter and for constantly bringing me oranges or fresh meat, and thanks to Kanlab for saving my skin during a run-in with the New People's Army (see chapter 26). I express my gratitude to all of them for generously sharing their languages and their homes with an outsider.

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Ana, was a friend who always looked out for my safety. Bill Allin, her American husband, told wonderful stories, was always there to listen and give advice, and acted to protect me when I was in danger. I cannot say enough about the gratitude I feel for their giving me a family in a small town so far from home.

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Microphone in the Mud is a true adventure story of the eleven months that a 25 year old woman spends in the jungles of the Philippines. When she arrives in Manila, Laura is a graduate student embarking on a journey to document a language spoken by 1500 hunter-gatherers. She has been told about possible dangers in the Philippines, but the people she meets are friendly and helpful, so she thinks that the warnings are exaggerated. She records her humorous views of the country and the people as she travels to the small town of Santa Ana, locates a boarding house, and searches for the right Agta language informant. Laura soon finds one and begins to work with him at his camp in the jungle, and the project is going remarkably well until she meets an ominous man who calls himself a Treasure Hunter.

About the author

Laura C. Robinson is a visiting assistant professor of linguistics at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and her research interests include documentation of endangered languages and reconstructing linguistic prehistory. In addition to conducting linguistic fieldwork in the northern Philippines and eastern Indonesia, she has also written a grammar of Dupanangan Agta, spoken in the northern Philippines. She is currently working on reconstructing the linguistic prehistory of the languages of the Alor archipelago in eastern Indonesia.