



## Joel's Missionary Journey

Joel Khopang was born in Machangbow village, and grew up in Dukdang village, in the Putao region of northern Burma. He had seven older brothers and sisters. The oldest sister was the only survivor from sicknesses such as malaria, cholera, and dysentery.

Joel was stillborn in the rice field at planting season. Because of the loss of their other children, his mother and father were heartbroken at the thought of losing another child.

**His father lifted the baby up and cried out to God to give him breath!  
He promised to dedicate this child to serve God his whole life, and wherever  
God would take him to serve, he would let him go.  
The baby took a breath and gave his first beautiful cry of life!**

God later blessed the family with two brothers after Joel.

From the time Joel was a small child, he loved to go to church and learn about God. He memorized Bible verses, learned Christian music, and became a youth leader at an early age. The church leaders saw the leadership qualities in Joel and gave him duties in the church. He led worship songs, taught Sunday school and started a youth choir. He inspired many young people to become involved in the church. Joel's father sent him to VBS during summer breaks and he attended Bible School in Putao for two years.

At age 19, Joel moved to Chiangmai, Thailand and began study in a Bible school to learn more from the Word of God. His heart's desire was to become a native preacher and missionary. While in Thailand, he met the Morse family. After finishing school in 1973, Joel joined the North Burma Christian Mission and began work as an evangelist. He traveled with Ron, Tom and Joni Morse and helped share the gospel with the Lisu people of northern Thailand. He also traveled with Jesse Yangmi evangelizing from village to village.

During this time, Joel joined with Jesse Yangmi, David Morse and others to update, revise and add commentary to the old translation of the Lisu Old and New Testaments. Joel primarily served as proof reader and helped with cross referencing the scriptures.

Joel's heritage is the Anung tribe from Mongolia. The Anung people migrated into Tibet and lived there for many generations. Later, many migrated into China, to northern Burma, and some to Thailand. They moved into already existing villages of other tribes such as Rawang, Lisu, and Tibetan people. Eventually, their language and tribal identity became lost as they intermingled with the other tribes. The Anung language was used less and less and almost became extinct, except among the very old.

The near extinction of his peoples' identity and language concerned Joel and he wanted to do something to bring them back as a people and restore the proud and numerous tribe of older times. Since they had no written language like many of the other tribes, Joel decided he wanted to create a written script for his people. Many of the tribal languages cannot be typed using the standard alphabet due to the sounds and tonal marks required for their language. Joel reasoned that using only the letters in the standard English alphabet would allow the use of a regular computer without created or altered characters. Joel enrolled in linguistic courses offered in Chiangmai. One prominent linguist teacher was Dr. Jimmy Harris.

In 1977, Joel, along with Joni Morse, went to see Dr. Harris and shared his desire to create a written language for the Anung people. Dr. Harris was very impressed with Joel's dream and was willing to help. After a few weeks, they created an appropriate alphabet and tone marks. Joel then started work on a primer for the Anung language.

During this time, and after a four year courtship, Joel asked Eugene and Helen Morse for permission to marry their daughter, Marilyn. After receiving their blessing, Joel and Marilyn were married on January 20, 1979. Marilyn soon joined the translation work and helped with typing and assembling the Anung booklets. They also developed a picture dictionary to help in teaching the younger children.

Marilyn is the granddaughter of J. Russell and Gertrude Morse who started mission work in Tibet in 1921. Eugene Morse, Marilyn's father, was only four months old when they first went into Asia. Gertrude Morse passed away in 1975, and J. Russell in 1991. Eugene and Helen Morse still live and serve in Thailand. Eugene Morse is 87 years old and Helen 85. Since both are in declining health, please keep them in your prayers.

After completing the primer, booklets were printed. Joel called a few people and began teaching the new written language. They, in turn, went home and began teaching the Anung alphabet and reading to the young, but the older people didn't want to be left out!

In August 1979, Joel and Marilyn came to America, and Joel enrolled in classes at Ozark Christian College. Joel was not fluent with the English language so English training was also necessary. Marilyn studied medicine for missions classes as well. On December 26, 1979, Joel and Marilyn welcomed their first child, a son they named Jesse Yashien. Joel attended classes for one year, but due to their financial situation, (their only support was \$50 a month from the Vero Christian Church in Florida), and extreme home sickness, they returned to Thailand in January of 1981. Once back in Thailand, Joel returned to evangelism, teaching, and helping with the mission work. On July 19, 1982, they welcomed their second child, a daughter, Saskia Louise.

With the encouragement of friends, Joel and Marilyn decided to go again to the United States and in 1984 re-enrolled at Ozark Christian College. Marilyn took night classes at a business college to be better equipped to help Joel in school and with the mission work.

On October 11, 1986, Joel and Marilyn welcomed their third child, a son, Shemaiah Joram. In May 1987, Joel graduated with a Bachelor of Christian Education degree and the Dally Award for excellence in Evangelism.

During the three years Joel and Marilyn were in the United States, they visited many churches, vacation Bible schools and Christian camps to raise support for their mission work. In the summer of 1987, Joel and Marilyn returned to Thailand and headed full force into their mission work. Back in Thailand, the Morse family, Jesse Yangmi and Joel saw and discussed the need to start leadership training among the tribal people. Joel taught and continued with this work for eight years.

In 1988, Joel and his uncle, Aram Khopang began work on an Anung New Testament. It took two years to complete the translation which included cross-references, maps of the Holy Lands and the journeys of the Apostle Paul. Joel's cousins, Aphong and Yohanyi worked daily, diligently typing the New Testament into the computer, taking turns since only one computer was available. After proof-reading the New Testament several times and checking over the maps, the completed copy was finally ready. Center Point Christian Church, Fairview Christian Church, and First Christian Church, all of Carthage, Missouri, raised the money to print the Anung New Testament. This was the very first book ever printed in the Anung language. Praise the Lord! During this time, Joel and Marilyn were blessed with a fourth addition to their family, a son, Uraiah Jared, born January 14, 1991.

Once the Anung New Testament was completed, printed and distributed, the request soon came for the translation of an Anung Hymnal. Joel and his uncle Aram started work on this project. It took several years, but they were able to translate over 700 songs to the Anung language. Only 554 songs were eventually selected to be included in the hymnal. The Anung Hymnal was printed in 2003 and has been distributed to the Anung people.

Since the creation of the Anung script in 1977, more than 70% of the Anung people can read and write in their own language. It is rewarding to know that Joel's people are now recognized as a separate ethnic group who have their own language, and are not just outsiders absorbed into other tribes. Most importantly, his people are able to read God's Word, the Living Word, and sing hymns of praise in their own language!

In 2004, the next big project was to translate the Old Testament into the Anung language. Joel's uncle, Aram Khopang, and his cousins, Jonathan Khopang, graduate of Ozark Christian College and Lincoln Christian Seminary, and Rueben Khopang, graduate of Minnesota Bible College and Lincoln Christian Seminary, were involved in helping with this translation.

The Old Testament is now completely translated and ready for printing. As soon as funds are available, it will also go to the printers. Please consider supporting the printing of Bibles and Christian literature into tribal languages. These are very important tools to teach and reach souls that are still lost.

In 2005, Marilyn began a project to record Christian songs to be used as inspiration and encouragement in the villages and among the tribal people. Much interest has come from this work and a music video was produced which was even more effective and popular. Hopes are high that more Christian music can be produced and distributed. Some of the music has even been broadcast over short wave radio to countries all over southern Asia.

## **MISSION WORK**

1. Evangelizing village to village
2. Church planting among the tribal groups
3. Establishing Bible schools
4. Literature production

5. Bible translation
6. Music ministry

In 1999, Joel and Jesse Yangmi started the Lisu Bible Institute (LBI), with a campus located in Chiang Dao, Thailand. Joel helped supervise the construction of the buildings and handled the finances. Joel taught in the school, was Dean of Students, and was Administrator and Financial Manager for the School. He also coached the soccer team that competed with other Thai schools and village teams.

After five years of working with LBI, Joel resigned in 2006 to start a new work with the Red Lahu group in Thailand. He has conducted leadership training classes for three years. These leaders then go out into other villages to teach and preach, and many new believers have been added through their evangelism.

Property has been purchased to start a Bible teaching school for the Lahu people. At this time, temporary bamboo houses are used for classrooms and living quarters. Work on a concrete structure has begun which will be used as a multi-purpose building. However, due to a financial shortage, it is not yet completed. As soon as funds are available, the building will be completed, and work will begin on a boys dorm, a girls dorm, a kitchen, bathrooms and shower rooms. Once these are in place, a four year Bible School for the Red Lahu tribe will be started. In the mean time, Joel is writing study books on different Bible topics for use in the Lahu Bible School and in the seminars. English teachers, music teachers, as well as Bible teachers are needed once the four year Bible School has begun. Please be in pray for the Lahu Bible School, and see if God is leading you to come to Thailand to teach for a short term, a semester or even a year.

**What a blessed calling to be involved in the teaching of God's word and  
reaching lost souls for Christ.**

In the future, Joel and Marilyn would like a home of their own to be used not only for living and a place to stay as they grow old, but as a headquarters for mission work.

Please keep this ministry in your prayers.

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