



## Puringa Sold His Shirt

By Walter Scragg

Puringa was a local missionary on the northeast coast of New Guinea and Pastor Cummings was the leader in that area. Puringa was on his way to see Pastor Cummings and request that he be allowed to go and do a very difficult and dangerous job.

"Sir," he said, "I would like to go again to the villages along the Upper Ramu River. When I visited there last time I passed several places where the message has never gone. I want to go and tell those people about Jesus and His coming."

Pastor Cummings looked at him seriously. "They are bad people, Puringa. I know the villages you mean, and they do not like us. You will have trouble if you go among them."

"But they must have the gospel, sir. I know their language. There is no one else to go. If I do not go they may never hear."

"But, Puringa, you are a valuable worker. We cannot spare you because the need is great here and there is so much to do."

Puringa persisted, and Pastor Cummings discussed with him what this would mean. After much talk it was agreed that Puringa should go.

"All right, Puringa," Pastor Cummings said, "go, and God be with you. We shall be praying for you and looking for you to return on time. God bless you."

Puringa was a rather short young man, with little schooling. True, he had spent one year at our training college in New Guinea, but he entered elementary school when he was fourteen and could not absorb much. So he had dropped out and begun preaching and teaching the story of the gospel.

Soon this young man proved what God can do with a person who puts self aside and consecrates himself completely to God's service. Time after time Puringa proved that consecration outweighs skill and knowledge when it comes to soul winning. He was and still is on fire for God.

This new assignment he had asked for was very difficult. Careful preparations were made even though there was not much to prepare, but Puringa wanted to be sure he had everything that he needed for the trip. He spent much time in prayer and Bible study. He wanted to be ready in every way for the difficult time ahead. Where he was going the people were noted for their cruelty and meanness. Besides, he would be lonely and completely isolated.

A few days later his canoe slid in among some thick branches on the banks of the Upper Ramu. It had been a long hard journey up the river. No outboard motor made the way easy for him. He paddled every inch of the way upstream. He hid his canoe carefully so he could find it when it was time to return home. Then he looked around and spotted the path that led to the first of the villages. Quickly he dropped to his knees.

"Help me," he prayed, "to show Your truth to these people. Make my life a witness to You and Your message. Help me know how to act and what to say. Help me to win some soul





to You. Amen."

He stood up and walked into the jungle. His destination was a large village high on a spur overlooking one of the tributaries of the Ramu. Built there for protection against enemies in years gone by, it was a central village from which trails led out to quite a number of smaller villages.

Puringa expected a hostile welcome, and he was not disappointed. But it was worse than he had feared! He was taken at once to the *luluai*, the village chief.

The *luluai* shouted at him, "We know who you are. You are from the Seven-day Mission. We did not ask you to come here. You will take away our wives, so that we only have one left. You will want us to get rid of our pigs and to stop smoking and chewing betel nut. We do not want you here!"

Puringa silently prayed again. Then he spoke.

"I have come among you as a friend. I have brought you pictures to look at. I have many stories and wonderful things to tell you. I will not force you to become Seven-days. I will only be with you a short time and then I must return to my home in Bogia."

There was much talking among the village elders. They muttered and glared. Then one or two laughed a cunning laugh, and they seemed to reach an agreement. The village spokesman—the *tu/tu* spoke.

"You may stay for a short while and tell us your stories. But you come as a stranger among us. You cannot live in our houses or eat from our gardens. You must build a house of your own. We shall *sell* you food, but we will not *give* you any."

Puringa knew what this meant. They were only tolerating him because they thought they could get some money from him by selling him food. When his money was gone he would have to go, or they would simply let him starve. He had a few shillings with him, which would keep him alive for a few weeks. Surely in that time the love of God would change their hearts. In any case, he had come with a mission to perform. He could not neglect his mission because of a small difficulty like this.

In a few days Puringa had built himself a hut of bamboo and *kunai* grass. But it seemed that every stick of bamboo, each blade of grass belonged to someone, and he had to spend some of his precious money for it—something he did not want to do.

When the hut was finished, Puringa began his work in earnest. Each morning and evening he would take his Picture Roll and go into the village. Then he would talk to whoever would listen. Sometimes some of the adults stopped by to hear him, but most often it was the children who ran to hear his stories.

This went on day after day, from village to village. Word had been sent abroad, and everywhere Puringa went he got the same greeting. There is nothing more difficult than trying to spread the gospel among people who refuse to accept what you try to teach them. But Puringa kept at his task.

He spoke to a number of people personally. Always the answer was the same: "We do not want you here. We are not Seven-days. We want to keep our pigs and our betel nut.





Go away and leave us alone. You are wasting your time."

It was a battle of faith against organized resistance. Puringa persisted with his teaching, using everything he could think of to change the attitudes. He visited the sick, he played with the children, and he even helped with some of the work around the village. But in all the villages where he visited, there seemed to be no one who wanted to hear about Jesus.

There was only one thing they wanted—Puringa's money. Food, they brought everyday—bananas, paw-paw, yams, taro, sweet potato; there was no shortage of food. But not a mouthful would they give him without demanding money for it all.

And Puringa's money dwindled quickly. The day came when he paid out his last shilling. Was the Lord trying his faith? Or was this an indication that he should leave these people? Yet perhaps now they will give me food, he thought.

"I cannot pay you for this food. All my money is gone." Puringa was speaking to the men who had brought food for him to buy.

"If you have no money, we will not give you food."

"But I have no money."

"Then you cannot have any food."

"But I shall starve."

"Then go back to your home. We do not want you here."

Puringa did not want to go. Surely there must be some way to stay with these people. He thought he had detected a slight change in their attitude lately, and he wanted to be with them just a little longer. There must be some way out. What do I have that these people would want to buy from me? he thought. Then he had a bright idea.

"If I give you my shirt, will you give me food for a week?"

One native stepped forward and accepted the offer. Puringa took off his shirt and gave it to the native. He had sold his shirt for food!

Next it was his undershirt. That would feed him for a few more days. Then he sold his mirror and a few odds and ends he had. All the time he tried to be as patient and loving as he could be. He tried to win these people with loving Christian behavior as well as with the Picture Roll and many stories. Then one day he sold one pair of his trousers. The other pair soon followed, and he was left with nothing but a piece of lap-lap to wind about his body. There was absolutely nothing left to sell.

You will say he should have given up long ago. God does not expect sacrifices such as these. But Puringa is not an ordinary man. He does not think of sacrifice—the word is foreign to him. All he can think of is the need of men, and out of his love for mankind he seeks to fill that need.

Now something else was worrying him. It seemed that his food would last just long enough for him to finish the time he had planned to spend among these people. He must leave them soon anyway, for he had promised to go back to Bogia to help Pastor Cummings. He was certain that in a few more days he would see a change, but he did not





have those few days. He went to the village one evening and made his last speech.

"I have been among you for many weeks now. Tomorrow I must go back. I have told you about the God who loves you. Now I must leave, for there is other work for me to do."

He spoke long and earnestly, pleading with the people to give their hearts to God. There was a murmuring among them, but no one stirred.

"After I have gone, think about what I have said. I shall pray for you. God may make you see your need of Him. If you want help, come to the Seven-day Mission. We shall try and help you if you need us."

Puringa was disappointed and puzzled as he pushed his canoe into midstream the following morning. They had taken everything from him, even though the natives were usually generous. No one, not one person had responded to his teaching. Had it all been in vain? Was there something wrong inside him?

He was still puzzled and still praying when he arrived back at the mission station a few days later. He told the unhappy tale to Pastor Cummings, and then went on with other work.

Months slipped by, and with the passing of time the people in the Upper Ramu were forgotten by some, but not by Puringa. He still carried them in his heart. He still prayed for them. Someday, he thought, I will go back. Those people need a teacher; they need this message to change their lives.

"Puringa! Puringa! You are wanted at the mission. Go at once!"

Puringa ran, and as he neared the mission house he saw a group of native men gathered around Pastor Cummings. He could tell from their dress that they were not Adventists. Who were they? What had they come for? Perhaps Pastor Cummings wanted him to interpret.

Then as he came closer he knew. These were the leaders of the villages where he had worked without success in the Upper Ramu. But why had they come?

"Do you know these men?" Pastor Cummings asked him.

"Yes, I know them all right. They come from the Upper Ramu."

"Listen to what they have to say. I have asked them to tell you their story."

"We have come to see you as you told us to, Puringa," said the old *tul-tul*. After you left we started to think. We missed your stories. We remembered what you had said about Jesus' coming soon, and we want to be ready. We talked about your life and how you behaved among us. You are a good man, Puringa, and we are wicked and selfish. We have come to make that right. Because of the way you lived, we have come to ask that a teacher be sent to our village. We have asked the missionary to send you back to us so that we may learn again the wonderful stories about Jesus. Please send us a teacher. We want to learn how to become Seven-days."

Months passed. Puringa sat fingering a new shirt that he had just bought. It was gleaming white, like his smile. It made him think of another shirt—one that he had sold. He smiled to himself. Perhaps this new shirt would also stand by him and help him win





someone for Jesus. He would gladly sell it for His Master. He thought of his fellow teacher and the wonderful success he was having in the Upper Ramu. Already there were reports of eighteen villages where the work was established. Churches and schools were being built.

Puringa had given up a lot. The way had seemed hard and fruitless, but he had done his best. How thankful he was for a God who could take his best and make it work to the saving of many souls for His kingdom.

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