



Ruth Thomson  
also known as Birbir  
to the Kayapó  
1940 - 2019

After graduating from Toronto Bible College (*Tyndale University College*) and completing linguistic studies at the University of North Dakota and the University of Oklahoma, Ruth joined Wycliffe Bible Translators (SIL). She completed her Jungle Training Camp in Mexico and then in 1965, at the age of 25, she journeyed to Brazil to begin linguistic research with the Kayapó, at that time one of 200 tribal groups in Brazil without a written language.

Together with Mickey Stout, a missionary from Unevangelized Fields Mission, they learned the Kayapó language first hand, devised a 17 vowel, 16 consonant alphabet as part of the process, and then taught the Kayapó to read their own language. Over the next three decades, Ruth's goal of



translating the New Testament and portions of the Old Testament and the JESUS film into Kayapó was realized. Interspersed with her translation work, Ruth lived among and ministered to the Kayapó, sharing in their joys and sorrows, including doctoring the sick, sometimes even pulling teeth! She became a daughter of the Kayapó – Birbir (Ruth) to them – all the while enduring the perils of the Amazon for a people, she not only respected, but came to regard as family.



By 1996, the first complete printing of the New Testament was produced and delivered to the Kayapó, together with other Scripture portions and the JESUS film. Thanks to a donation from Knox World Mission, in 2018, the first edition of "Portions of the Old Testament" was printed to meet a growing demand for the written Word among the Kayapó. It features Genesis, Exodus, Jonah and the Life of Christ. It was printed by the Bible Society of Brazil.

Not one to slow down, Ruth continued to dedicate herself to translation work, including the distribution of an audio version of the Kayapó New Testament, which she helped dictate. She was looking forward to continuing work on the Old Testament – Psalms, Proverbs and Isaiah. Even with those projects on the go, Ruth found time to assist an orphanage in Kenya for a time.

Ruth was planning to return to Brazil in early January of this year, but her departure was delayed due to medical issues.



On Saturday, January 12, 2019, at the age of 78, Ruth passed away at Grey Bruce Health Services, Owen Sound.

Pastor John Quadra da Costa from Alta Floresta, MT, Brazil shared, "Of all her [Ruth's] gifts, what I most admired was her humility. Even though she was a faith hero to me, she always said she had not done anything!"

### ***"The Lord took Birbir, but the Word of God that she translated continues with us"***

In remembering Ruth, the krākênhti Kayapó said, "Birbir (Ruth) brought the Word of God to us. We loved her very much. She taught us the Word of God in the courses, because it was Birbir (Ruth) and Earl Trapp who translated the Word of God into our language. She recorded the New Testament audio in the Motukôre village, and others assisted in the recording of the New Testament audio in our dialect. The Lord took Birbir, but the Word of God that she translated continues with us. We will continue listening to the Word of God that she recorded. We will all miss her very much."

### ***The translation ministry continues...***

#### **Dione Santos Lima**

Dione worked alongside Ruth, both in scripture translation work and in general ministry to the Kayapó. In coordination with other translators, Dione is determined to carry on the translation of portions of scripture started by her friend and colleague, Ruth.

Dione shared, "I met Ruth Thomson the year that I began my ministry with the Kayapó people, in 1992. She taught me so much. Her dedication to missionary work was admired by all. She greatly encouraged me, and her life was an example to me and many others. Thank you, God, for the life of Ruth Thomson, for her dedication to the missionary work here with the Kayapó people and for all those who supported this missionary work. We will greatly miss her! There is a great challenge ahead of us to continue the work she was doing in the translation of the Old Testament. Pray to the Lord of the harvest that He will send more workers. Pray for more missionaries to work with the Kayapó."



To learn more about Dione, visit <https://lamcanada.ca/missionary/dione-and-samuel-santos-lima-sabrina/>.

*"Well done thou good and faithful servant" are words that aptly sum up Ruth's life of sacrifice and obedience to God's call upon her life. She will be deeply missed, especially by all of us here at LAM.*