

This interview article of Jeff Allen is to appear in the June 2010 issue of the Multnomah Connection, the Alumni magazine of Multnomah University (formerly Multnomah Bible College and Seminary)

### **Haiti Disaster Relief ministry from a dining room in France**

During the several years of my master's and doctoral work in the area of Creole linguistics, I also taught linguistics courses to missionaries in training at the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in France and participated as a Creole researcher with SIL/Wycliffe teams. Unable to obtain traditional missionary financial support led me to start working in the translation software field. I soon became known as the Creole language technology guy by a simple phone call from Carnegie Mellon University with an incredible offer to work on an English-Haitian Creole speech-to-speech translation system. Two years led to completing a fully functional prototype which was shelved in 1999 due to changes in language research needs. So my French wife and I returned to her homeland.

Our family also sponsored a Haitian child through Compassion International for several years until he finished school. We still have several years of written correspondence in Haitian Creole telling of his daily life and school activities.

An attempt to create a start-up software company for Creoles and other minority languages led to a 120-page marketing and business plan (2-3 years of my free time) which ended with a dual blow of the dotcom crash in 2000 and the event of September 11, 2001. Forced to switch to the telecom software field, I had to shelve minority languages again.

Then I sat watching the TV in France in mid-January 2010 with eyes full of tears as 10 years of studies and work had been spent a decade before to promote the mother tongue of Creole speakers. All in vain if thousands of people would suffer and die today because of a translation system in a box, language data archived on servers, and a buried business plan.

A couple of calls and less than a week of after-work evenings and all-nighters, we released a good portion of the language data from the previous CMU project. Within a matter of days, Microsoft Bing and Google Translate released Haitian Creole in their respective online translation systems based on that data. The company Interlecta followed suite with a Blackberry application. CrisisCamps DC led to the translation system called CrisisTerp. Creole language technologies have been springing up for 4 months thanks to that data-release decision.

Then Voice of America came for an interview, followed by MultiLingual Computing magazine, Radio France Internationale, SAP World News magazine, and other articles in the New York Times and International Herald Tribune. This has kept a focus on meeting needs for disaster relief and long-term reconstruction. It has also allowed me to answer the burning question of many business and NGO leaders of why I cared about Creole languages. During Easter, I can post a video recounting the resurrection story in Haitian Creole that business people worldwide do not mock but rather embrace. Technology for Creole languages has opened a new ministry to give my testimony to many CEOs, presidents and VPs who would probably turn away in traditional testimony contexts.

Full story at: <http://www.allenkeys2languages.org>

**Biosketch**

After finishing AA (1987) and BA (1989) degrees at Multnomah, Jeff Allen went on to complete a 2nd BA degree (French) at Portland State University, Masters and doctoral degrees in Creole linguistics at the Université Lyon 2 in France. He also taught for SIL in France. He entered the translation software engineering field in the mid-90s and participated in developing a speech-to-speech translation system for English-Haitian Creole at Carnegie Mellon University. Returning to France in the late 90s, he has worked at a few translation system providers, and now also in the area of business intelligence applications. He and wife Guylaine have two young children (Raphaël and Matthew) and live in the suburbs of Paris, France. Guylaine has worked for Campus Crusade for the Middle Eastern countries. They have been serving in different ways in a local protestant evangelical church in their town for the past 11 years. He remains in contact with Multnomah faculty and college peers via the Facebook and LinkedIn networks.