

This is a complete transcript of the oral history interview with **Ingrid (Hult) Trobisch (CN 400, T1)** for the Billy Graham Center Archives. No spoken words that were recorded are omitted. In a very few cases, the transcribers could not understand what was said, in which case [unclear] was inserted. Also, grunts and verbal hesitations such as “ah” or “um” are usually omitted. Readers of this transcript should remember that this is a transcript of spoken English, which follows a different rhythm and even rule than written English.

. . . Three dots indicate an interruption or break in the train of thought within the sentence of the speaker.

. . . . Four dots indicate what the transcriber believes to be the end of an incomplete sentence.

( ) Word in parentheses are asides made by the speaker.

[ ] Words in brackets are comments made by the transcriber.

This transcript was created by Robert Shuster and Katherine Hamilton and completed April 2009.

**Please note:** This oral history interview expresses the personal memories and opinions of the interviewee and does not necessarily represent the views or policies of the Billy Graham Center Archives or Wheaton College.

**Collection 400, Tape 1. Oral history interview with Ingrid Trobisch by Robert Shuster on September 27, 1988.**

**SHUSTER:** This is an interview with Mrs. Ingrid Trobisch by Robert Shuster for the Archives of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College. This interview took place on September 27<sup>th</sup>, 1988, in Mrs. Trobisch's home in Springfield, Missouri, at 3 pm...sorry, at 1:44 pm. I've read your book *On Our Way Rejoicing* in which you describe your own, you and your husband's, experiences in Africa and also your family's missionary activities all around the world. And we will try in this interview not to cover the same ground because it is done so well there. But why don't we start off with some of the...some of your impressions and memories. Now you were born in Tanzania, Tanganyika, is that correct?

**TROBISCH:** Yes. It was Tanganyika at that time. Tanzania is the combination of Tanganyika and Zanzibar.

**SHUSTER:** Do you have memories from that time? From those early days?

**TROBISCH:** I have no memories, because my parents were waiting for me to be born, so that they could get on the ship to come home. So, when I was three weeks old, we were on our way home, via Europe. But, of course, I've heard my parents talk about it. And since a brother and a sister spent several years there, and I had visits to the field, I feel as if at least I know what they are talking about.

**SHUSTER:** So your first time in Africa was then when you came as a young woman?

**TROBISCH:** That's right. That's right.

**SHUSTER:** And what year was that?

**TROBISCH:** I left the States in 1949. I had finished college, Bible school, some special medical training, and I had to go to France for almost two years to get my French teaching certificate to go to French Cameroon in West Africa. And I didn't arrive in Africa until the fall of 1950.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall, stepping off the boat, what your very first impressions were?

**TROBISCH:** The boat stopped in Dakar, and we got off the boat there. I remember looking at the African porters that came and got baggage, and I have always liked to notice hands of people, and I thought, "Look at those fine beautiful hands." They looked as if they could have been artists' hands. It was a very interesting observation that...

**SHUSTER:** How do you mean like artists' hands?

**TROBISCH:** Fine boned, skillful. And it was something that I noticed all of my years in Africa. If we had an African helper, whether he was in the dispensary, the kitchen, I knew that his hands could do things far more skillfully than mine.

**SHUSTER:** Why do you think that was?

**TROBISCH:** I think it was a gift. A gift that God has given to Africans. My brother, who was a missionary doctor in Tanzania, said that he believes that each race of people has been given a special gift. By God, he said there is no doubt in his mind, that the Jewish people have a very sharp intellect and are able to use that. And he feels that the African has been given an absolutely magnificent body. He said, for example, "I would have patients, men, who would come to see me and they were sick with malaria, with parasites, with dysen...ten diseases," he said, "they could have. And still they were out there doing a day's work. A little slow perhaps, but still, they were working." And I think we have seen that with some of our...our black athletes. I was very much struck by the African women. And I know of no women that I respect more in the whole world, as...as a class, than the African women. At her utter lack of self-pity, and her ability to carry on with zest, no matter how hard. I didn't hear her moan and cry, but she said, "Come on, we can do it."

**SHUSTER:** Can you think of an example of that from your time in Africa?

**TROBISCH:** Well, I believe that certainly they have suffered more, African women have suffered more in this generation, from things like childbirth. It was maybe a generation where it...where they were ill-nourished. And now that they are better nourished and there is a discrepancy often between the pelvic waists and the size of the unborn child (and it is not true that they go to the woods and have their babies, just like that), but it is very, very difficult. Again, I quote my brother. The tribe that he worked with, the Iramba [?] tribe, he said that fifty percent of the first births had to be cesarean, because the girls were young, the size of the babies, or it could have cost the life of the mother or the baby. We often don't think of that. And I hear the same thing of a doctor in South Africa telling this difference. And yet there wasn't the complaining.

**SHUSTER:** Why do you think that is?

**TROBISCH:** I think they have a greater acceptance. "In acceptance lieth peace" [from a poem by Amy Carmichael].

**SHUSTER:** Acceptance of...?

**TROBISCH:** Well, certainly the Mohammedan and the Muslim teach fate, but I am thinking when these people are becoming Christians they can also learn to accept life as it is, and not chafe themselves sore because something is not perfect. I certainly feel much more at ease with my African sisters than I do with many of my European or American sisters. If I'm living...and just the day-by-day things.

**SHUSTER:** Did you observe these traits when you were in Cameroon?

**TROBISCH:** That's when I began to observe them. I certainly didn't have the depth of experience at that time. I wasn't married when I went out, so I was single, but I was caught up immediately with admiration for the people. And when you first come all the faces look alike, just as the Africans say, "Just when we see you whites, you all look the same." But it didn't take very long



before we were giving nicknames to the different Africans in our class. I'm remembering in Tchollire [?]. We had a very strong courageous lady, who, who was even a little taller than her husband, and we called her Mrs. Roosevelt. We even called her Eleanor. Even her profile reminded us of Eleanor. So, you learn to individualize.

**SHUSTER:** Do you recall from your first experiences, so of, perhaps specific examples of things that arouse your admiration?

**TROBISCH:** The ability to bear pain, as I mentioned. The ability to work at a certain measured pace. An African woman would tell you, "A lady does not hurry." And there's a certain nobility and grace, I noticed, that comes from the way they learn to carry things on their head. In most African women, and I was privileged to notice, there is not an ounce of extra fat in their bodies, and that was simply because of the amount of work that they did, and eating one meal a day and that sometimes not very much. I rarely saw an African mother lose patience with her child. They say that, at least in traditional Africa, there were no neurotic children, no neurosis, and one of the reasons was that up till the age of five the child's feet barely touched the ground. Either on the mothers back, or the lap, or the lap of the others around. Those are the things that, well, I have admired. And where I have learned. I always feel that I'm on the learning end. Now when I go to Africa, I never fail to be exhilarated.

**SHUSTER:** How would you describe the church and the Cameroons when you first came? What were some of the things that were...which were like church in America and Europe and which ways was it different or special?

**TROBISCH:** Well, there wasn't much of a church when we first came. There was just a handful of congregations and they were at their beginnings. And we saw that one of our main tasks was to train the future African pastors. And since this seemed to be a special gift that Walter had, was that of training his Timothys and discipling, three of the....

**SHUSTER:** Walter, of course, was your husband.

**TROBISCH:** Walter, yes. Three of the finest candidates who had served faithfully as evangelists were sent to our station to live with us. They were away from their own language and they had to live in very simple conditions. And it was my job to teach them French a certain number of hours and Walter had his theological courses and Bible courses. And it was a great thing to know that the one man went on to be the president of the church and has become one of the leaders in today's African church movements, and the other has been a very faithful pastor and evangelist all these years. He actually baptized our firstborn daughter. And the third one was killed by lightning, which was a great sadness to the church.

**SHUSTER:** What were their names?

**TROBISCH:** Andre Garber [?], Paul Darmin [?], who became the...I suppose you would call the bishop of the church later on, and the other was Paul, Paul Sypison [?], the one who was killed by lightning.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned that you felt one of your tasks was to train up pastors. What were some of the things you felt they had to learn, some of the things they would need?

**TROBISCH:** I remember one experience of calling together the group of Africans who came every Sunday to our home chapel, and they had devotions every night, and Walter told these evangelists, "Teach them the Ten Commandments." And every evening they studied, you know, one more commandment, and by the time they reached the tenth commandment the Africans said, "They put their bundles, wrapped up everything, put on their head and started to walk away, and were going to leave the mission compound." And it was one afternoon, we saw them all walking down the road [laughs]. And Walter got on his motorcycle, and stopped them and said, "What's the matter?" And they said, "We have just understood that if we try to live according to the Ten Commandments, we will never make it. Our sins are greater than those mountains there. There is no hope for us." And it was at that time that the Law had really settled in their hearts and he was able to proclaim the gospel and it was the beginning of a revival, an awakening or whatever. Only there had been nothing before, but that's how it began. In teaching the Law, and then the gospel. I'll never forget that. And if it hadn't been for the help of these two faithful men, Andre and Paul, we probably would not have succeeded. In a German book, that has never been published in English, my husband has written a story of these very first adventures as he wrote them to his praying friends in Germany and its priceless. His book is called *Ihr werdet erfahren, daß ich der Herr bin*, "He will know that I am the Lord your God", and he is recounting one...one experience after another. 'Cause it was a rare thing for us to be able to go into a territory where there had never been a witness for Christ before. It was the Moslem (at least Moslem in name) king, and he was the ruler. But even he sat with his mouth open, listening to the stories that we had to tell. And now when I think about it, it was a great time. We won their confidence, so that they would listen to us, by taking care of their physical needs. When we got up in the morning, we'd open the door to our two-room mud hut and see about forty people sitting outside waiting for medicine, bind up their sores, needed eye medicine, some of them thought they needed a shot of penicillin for whatever ailed them, and so that's how we spent our mornings, was taking care of those needs. And I can still recall a feeling of...of deep joy, like I had never known up till that time, of realizing that here God had called us to work hand in hand. To be on the front line, to be the very first missionaries, and we actually saw what was happening, planting the seed of love. At first we saw only men who came to our door, and then after we had faithfully taken care of them a couple of weeks, one of the working men, who was trying to fix our little kitchen room, said that his wife was sick and would I please go with him to go visit her. Now he had at least a working knowledge at that time of Fulani, the *lingua franca*, and I remember going to her hut, and she had never seen a white woman before. So first of all, he had to talk...

**SHUSTER:** A blond white woman.

**TROBISCH:** Yes. He had to talk and explain that that was all right. And she allowed me to fix her. She had a very bad ulcer, and we saw it being healed. Just through....

**SHUSTER:** Now did you have much medical preparation, or...?

**TROBISCH:** I took the course that was offered at Lutheran Bible School where I attended.

**SHUSTER:** A course in...?

**TROBISCH:** In tropical medicine. Just to...so that we knew how to treat malaria, tropical ulcers, we knew how to give shots, we even had some dentistry. And my husband had worked very closely with one of his friends in Germany who was a dentist, so we had a whole set of forceps and even a hand, how do you say....?

**SHUSTER:** Drill?

**TROBISCH:** Drill, that he could do with his foot, you know. So, we used those things. We delivered babies. I had taken a course in obstetrics, a nurses course, and had made that my specialty. And that soon got around too. One of the babies that was born didn't breathe, and the mother thought the baby was dead. And she was wailing and giving up and I took the baby into our...our room, and had a hot water bottle and warm [sic], and pretty soon the baby started breathing. So a half hour later I brought the baby back to the mother, and she was crying, and that established firmly our reputation that we could make dead babies live again. So after that we were called often to help. Sometimes when it was too late. My brother, who was a medical missionary, would comfort me, and he said, "You know, ninety percent of the people you can't help, I can't help either." And he said, "Medicine is often just good common sense." One thing you learn is not to say, "I can't." You do something. It's just the fact that you care and show your love in that way.

**SHUSTER:** You mentioned about the privilege it was to be in an area where Christianity was brand new, where you were the first missionaries to come there. Thinking back, when you began explaining the gospel, presenting the gospel, what kind of questions did people ask? What kind of things did they find easy to accept? What kind of things in the gospel did they find hard to accept?

**TROBISCH:** They loved the Old Testament stories. I remember it just...translating, we had to translate from French into Fulani, so that we actually had a text to talk about every Sunday. And I re...the whole story of Abraham sending his servant to get a wife for his son Issac. This was not at all hard for them to understand. And in fact, Walter and I understood that story for the first time seeing it there.

**SHUSTER:** How do you mean?

**TROBISCH:** Because it was so like their own way. I mean, a man wouldn't go out and look for a wife for himself. He would send his father or his uncle, or someone to be the mediator and the gifts that they gave each other, it was all very easy. I think the Old Testament was far easier for them to understand than the New Testament. Because Jesus...Jesus was this, this, loving person, was something that they could not believe.

**SHUSTER:** Why was that?

**TROBISCH:** They were certainly colored by the Moslem rulers and for the them God is only one person, and that God had a son...I would say that was the greatest stumbling block for...for them. Certainly for the Moslems.

**SHUSTER:** But you said also that the idea that Christ was a loving God was hard to accept?

**TROBISCH:** Uh-huh.

**SHUSTER:** Why...why was that?

**TROBISCH:** Simply because they had never seen it.

**SHUSTER:** They had never seen...

**TROBISCH:** And we had had to...the fact that Walter and I could live together in love and harmony in our family was perhaps the first way that they could believe. Because for them, marriage was something that you do to propagate.

**SHUSTER:** Yeah, that's off. [Disruption in the recording] A brief interruption there when a neighbor came by. You were saying...

**TROBISCH:** That the only way for the Africans in a new territory to begin to understand the love of God, as manifested through Jesus Christ, was for us as a couple to show it in the way we treated one another. We didn't have children yet at that time, but later on we did and we could see that. The first class that Walter taught on love and marriage, when we were on the other extreme of Cameroon, you know....

**SHUSTER:** At the seminary.

**TROBISCH:** No it was just a college.

**SHUSTER:** Oh, a college.

**TROBISCH:** He asked his students what they had learned after the first semester's course. And they said we learned that love was not something cruel. And they thought of love and sex as being the same thing. And so it was through that they'd begin to understand. And when an African pastor told me recently in Chicago at this African congress he said, "Your messages, your books, have revolutionized African marriages." And it's...it's bringing Christ into the marriage relationship that this is...this is so foreign to the traditional, where men stays with men and women with the women, and the wife of the man is like an ambassador from a foreign tribe. He never trusts her because she is not of his family. You can only trust your blood brothers and sisters. So this is...this is something I think that we began. That was also, in Tchollire, that we began to see that if we were to be effective missionaries, of any kind, any place to Africa today, we had to have a message on family and marriage. After three years, the first seven Christians were baptized. And shortly after that wonderful baptismal ceremony, the sort of the leader, his name was Ananias, the same as Ananias in Acts [Acts 5:1-11], took a second wife. And we were absolutely perplexed. Walter couldn't understand it. And instead of condemning him, which is what missionaries had been doing up till then, put him out of the church because he took a second wife, he decided to talk to him. So he spent hours and hours one night. And the essence of it was, he said, "Ananias, don't you love your wife, your first wife?" And he said, "Of course I love my first wife. And just because I do love her, I took a second wife, because she has now had our first child and it is in our tradition that a man does not sleep with his wife after the birth of a child for at least two years if it's a girl, three years if it's a

boy.” And it happened to be a boy. And so, in order to protect his wife and child he got a second wife. And that’s when it dawned on Walter and me that if we are to plant the church and have a message on family life, we also have to teach them something about where babies come from.

**SHUSTER:** They knew where babies come from.

**TROBISCH:** They knew where babies came from, but they didn’t know how it got started. They had some very wrong ideas. One of them was certainly, and that’s why it spread through Africa, that if a woman is breast feeding and she sleeps with her husband, the danger is that, they think, that the husband’s semen will get into the milk, will poison the baby, the baby will die. So any time a baby had any kind of sickness, diarrhea, what, they said the other women would accuse the woman of...so you have to understand that.

**SHUSTER:** She would...she would come under a lot of peer pressure from other women for endangering her child by sleeping with her husband.

**TROBISCH:** Yes, Yes. And there were so many wrong ideas about childbirth too. For example, we saw how women were forced to sit up when they were in labor, they were not allowed to lay down, they had to sit up. And for a first baby, as I told you, the labor could be two or three days long and she would be utterly exhausted. And I said, “Well, why don’t you allow her to rest?” “No, no madame. If she laid down, the baby would drown.” And so that was when...I had my teaching charts, I had some wonderful...showing how the baby grew in the mother’s womb and how the baby was already upside down and so forth. They were thrilled and couldn’t quite understand, and it began to dawn on them, that it wasn’t until I had a child myself that I really could speak to them with authority about that.

**SHUSTER:** Sure.

**TROBISCH:** And then I remember after our first child was born, Walter and I would go for a walk every night and Walter carried the baby. And we didn’t have a buggy so he carried the baby. And everyone shook their head, they had never, ever, seen a man carry a baby, because that’s the women’s work. And then finally one of the older women, she said, “Well, maybe that’s right. Before the baby was born, *madame* carried the baby. Now it’s right that *monsieur* does it.” And sure enough then, our helper in the kitchen, when his wife had a baby, he very proudly carried that baby to show that that was also a manly thing to do. So that’s why I mean by examples and teaching and understanding.

**SHUSTER:** Did the introduction of these examples, these different ways, did they cause any resentment from people who preferred the old ways?

**TROBISCH:** Well, I think it’s always...you have to be prepared for a certain amount of resistance. I wouldn’t say resentment but resistance. How can you change? You know. I can still remember one African elderly man, very full of dignity, and I had given a lecture to...to men and women about how babies grow in the mother’s womb and showing pictures. And this man had an envelope and he said, “Here, I have an envelope, this envelope is closed, can you tell me what’s inside that envelope?” And I said, “No.” And he said, “How do you know what’s inside a woman’s stomach?”





So then my husband, very graciously and kindly, explained that there are doctors and that they, you know, study bodies and so forth, and that's how they know these things. I mean, but always you treat them with dignity and explanation and the man accepted that and said "Okay," you know. But it was an inch-by-inch teaching. And then it was great to see the good things that happened after that.

**SHUSTER:** How, after the church had...you had first the seven converts and then more, what was a typical service like? How would you recall the events of a service?

**TROBISCH:** They...they loved to sing, and that was the first thing that we did, was some of the simple choruses. They had been translated into Fulani. We would hear them singing that every night, and they would.....

**SHUSTER:** Simple choruses from...?

**TROBISCH:** Oh, I think of this one "*Jesu lawul dun*" [?], "Jesus is the way, to my Father's house, to my Father's house." I mean, those were Sunday school choruses, you know? And then it begins...

**SHUSTER:** From, from Europe, or from United States?

**TROBISCH:** Well, they had been in the southern part of Cameroon. These were songs that had been...the melodies were known. And the other tribal languages....there were forty-two different distinct languages in Cameroon. And most of our mission work had been done by the Bayas and now we were in a new territory where we used Fulani. So we translated then, into Fulani. I don't know how good it was, but they understood it and they helped us. We took the Mohammedan... the *mullah* was the Moslem priest. He gave us his son that we should teach his son French. And then he, in turn, helped us with his very classical Fulani. And then he would come to our church services, and his father would come too in order to hear his son read. So this was...these were some of the tricks that we used. It was a thrilling thing to see that in this territory of Rey Bouba, where there had been no witness, after four years. Then there were more Christians then we had to go to the south and another missionary and his wife took over. And it wasn't until maybe ten years later that we were invited back to do a marriage retreat seminar for these people. And here we saw they had built their own church, without any money from the [United] States. They had gathered the stones, cement, they had a church treasury and the treasury was an iron drum, full of rocks with a ring around it that you could lock and three different men had the keys to it so that no one could just go in and take money. And with that they bought cement, everyone gave a tithe of their garden products, or their peanuts, or whatever they grew there, and they had established preaching places out of this congregation and there were a hundred different preaching places that this church was...had established.

**SHUSTER:** What's a preaching place?

**TROBISCH:** A preaching place is somewhere you go on Sunday morning, a little village, and the people gather. And every Sunday morning they went out. And they would have different...some evangelists stayed in certain territories and then they would send out. The first ones to learn how to read and write, they would go out and tell the stories in the other villages.

**SHUSTER:** When these evangelists went out to a new village, how did they start? What was their first message like? Did you hear them preach?

**TROBISCH:** I'm trying to think how the ones that I remember...you know, that was long time ago. I remember the Gospel of John, translating that into Fulani. "And the word was light," you know, "and in him was no darkness at all." [John 1:5] And I remember hearing evangelists just speak about that. What it was like to have light instead of darkness. And watching the people's faces get light, because he understood what he was saying. I would say the Africans have a great gift of spirituality. Of being able to see and feel these things with their souls. Much more so than a people that's very mechanically oriented. Once you had the Word of God and you had a man who had understood at least a portion of that, then he was giving it out. Why, it just kept growing. And then our successor immediately started a pastors training center. So they would send out an evangelist for three months, and then they would come back to the station and he would train them for three months, and then they would go back out. In fact, this was a solid Mohammedan territory. And it was so successful, the building of these little chapels, the people did it themselves, that the Moslems then rose up and had an active campaign to burn them down. And it made the headlines in other parts of Africa because this was strictly against the policies of the new Republic of Cameroon, which was established about that time in 1960.

**SHUSTER:** In what sense against the policies?

**TROBISCH:** In 1960 Cameroon became independent. They wanted to say, "We are tolerant." We had...,

**SHUSTER:** So burning down the chapels was against the policies.

**TROBISCH:** They had a Moslem leader, [President Ahamadou] Ahidjo, but he said, "We want to show tolerance." And so when...when these Moslems in the north went out and burned down the chapels, they had to actually reimburse the people for them. And they succeeded, because the Christians dared to stand up for their rights.

**SHUSTER:** But...but the early friendliness you describe with the Muslims, where the Muslim ruler allowed you to come in, and the Muslim priest sent his son, that didn't last?

**TROBISCH:** No. The Moslem priest was imprisoned at one time, then, the last time Walter saw him he was in prison for his friendliness to Walter. But his wives (he had four wives) they took turns every day visiting him and bringing him food. Walter wrote a wonderful article about this experience and I know it was printed in one of our church papers. I just can recall now seeing this, I have to look for it in the archives, because it was a classic on missions to Moslems, which are very different in Africa than anything that you would see in the Arab countries.

**SHUSTER:** How different?

**TROBISCH:** Well, the Arabian culture has certainly had much more schooling and backing, and fanatically trained, while here it was sort of a cultural thing...

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**TROBISCH:** ...that you became Moslem. You were of a higher level. In the many thousands of letters that Walter got from readers of, say, *I Loved a Girl* [one of the books by Walter Trobisch], there was a high percentage of Moslem young men that wrote to him. And they would say, "Dear Mr. Trobisch, I read your book, *I Loved A Girl*, please help me to find a Christian wife." This is not forbidden, you see, for a Moslem to marry a Christian. And so Walter would write back and say, "Why do you want a Christian wife?" And they would say, "Because Christian women are more faithful." So Walter would write again, "Why are they more faithful?" And then he would be at the center of the gospel. So it was a tremendously fascinating and fruitful time, those 1950s through 1960s. We were privileged to see that beginning.

**SHUSTER:** We were talking a little bit about a typical service in Cameroon. You mentioned a little bit that there was a lot of music, because they loved to sing. What were the other elements of the service?

**TROBISCH:** And wonderful preaching. From the very first Sunday I was there, and I didn't understand a word unless it was in French, but this was Bayan, and I'd look at the preacher and I thought, "Oh, he could be on stage someplace in America or Europe. Just how he's acting out this story." I mean you could get him...and he's a natural and a born orator, you know. There certainly wasn't anyone that was sleeping when they were...And if the pastor would get tired of preaching, then the congregation would automatically sing a song and clap so that he would have new strength to keep on. And it was never, you know, that was something that....

**SHUSTER:** How long would the service last?

**TROBISCH:** We tried to keep it down to an hour-and-a-half. But sometimes others, I know, did two and three hours. Especially when there was participation. People had testimonies, they wanted to pray, wanted to sing.

**SHUSTER:** What were some of the themes of sermons? What were some of the more common sermon topics?

**TROBISCH:** Oh, they loved the Prodigal Son. That would be...they would act out the scenes of *Pilgrim's Progress*, I remember, as they became more advanced. That was one of the favorite themes, to act them out. They were very good at role-playing. You know, any of the biblical stories. The raising of the dead, the miracles, it was no problem for them to accept that.

**SHUSTER:** Why do you think that pilgrims...Prodigal Son was popular?

**TROBISCH:** They could understand what it was like for a son to take his inheritance, to go away, to waste it, and then to be received back home.

**SHUSTER:** [pauses] Of course, you have said before that the idea of a loving God was something that they had to get used to.

**TROBISCH:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** And that's the main theme, I guess, of the Prodigal Son.

**TROBISCH:** Yes. That's right.

**SHUSTER:** What were some of the other...after the church had gotten established a little bit, what were some of the other events during a typical week that would go on?

**TROBISCH:** There was, every afternoon, some kind of educational program going on for the women. Women's classes, so that they would learn how to read, some of the prin...principles, [unclear word] of childcare, of good nutrition. I taught...at the beginning, I taught the more advanced ones, Walter taught the beginners how to read and write. We used the wall of our mud house as a blackboard; you could put chalk on it and then wipe it off again. And good teaching, you start where the person is and then take it from there. So that was our...that's what we tried to do. Whatever the need, we tried to meet them there and then go on from there and take them further. And I think that Walter had a great gift of making abstract things clear, concrete. He was a great story teller, and could...could lead people. He was a good pedagogue. Both of his parents were teachers. He always said he was not going to end up being a teacher, but I think that's what he did.

**SHUSTER:** Were there other events during the week? Typical week in the United States, for example....

**TROBISCH:** Yes, well we would always have prayer services, mid-week services. They had early morning devotions before they went to work, of course. [Pauses] I just know we worked from dawn till dusk [chuckles] and we always had a wonderful hour of celebration, or a half-hour of celebration when the day's work was done, and we would sit in front of our...our little house with the straw roof and veranda, and have a glass of lemonade that we had made from lemons that maybe six months before you had to fix them and make this syrup, we called it, so that they would keep. And then we would watch the first star come out. And I remember Walter writing a letter to his friends at home that said, "Who of you have ever taken the time to sit in front of your house and watch the first star come out?" And then the evenings were largely private. They had their...their main meal at nine, so we would hear the women pounding the grain, and cooking, and singing. And that was our private time then too. And we learned something about mental health. When you have no co-workers, when you have no other white people, Walter read something every evening while I would do hand work.

**SHUSTER:** Read aloud?

**TROBISCH:** Read aloud. Yes. He had a German book, a French book and an English book. And it was very hard to find good books that were worthy of being read aloud. And every Friday night was fun night. That's when we played games together. And we stuck to that.

**SHUSTER:** What kind of games?

**TROBISCH:** Oh, checkers. [Pauses] I'm trying to think. Some of the card games that he had learned as a child that he loved to play.

**SHUSTER:** *Gaigle?* [German card game]

**TROBISCH:** Uh-huh. And then we had a little wind-up phonograph and three records. And so by...by playing those we could make it festive. And then once a week, usually on Friday, got mail, so that was a big celebration too, we could read our mail.

**SHUSTER:** What were the three records you had?

**TROBISCH:** One was *Kleine Nachmusik* from Mozart, and one was Carl Maria Von Weber, *Aufforderung zum Tanz*, and one was, the...*Carmen*. I can still hear it. So depending on how you felt you could play those. But you had to wind it up ahead of time.

**SHUSTER:** How did...how did you support yourself in the village? Where did your food come from?

**TROBISCH:** Once or twice a week they had a market, down in the village, and sometimes I would go but mostly I sent the one who helped in the kitchen because he could get far better bargains than I. And we had bananas, if we were lucky, or plantains, vegetables, very few vegetables. We had a little garden plot down by the stream and about the only thing that grew were eggplants and tomatoes. So I learned about a hundred ways to fix eggplants and tomatoes. And then, once a week, there would be meat for sale. They would kill one cow in the village, and if the cook was there, well, he would get a good piece of that. But the cow had certainly walked a thousand miles before he came there, so we had to use the pressure cooker. But it's strange, those...those...I barely thought of those things. When we went to the capital city, Yaoundé, we got cases of powdered milk, of...of flour, and very few other things. Otherwise we lived from the land.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh. You raised...some things you raised yourself?

**TROBISCH:** Quaker, I mean, we had Quaker oats. We could get that in tin cans.

**SHUSTER:** And you raised some things yourself?

**TROBISCH:** Yes. And we baked our own bread, of course. And we...we had this not very good oleo, margarine, I remember. There was not...not such a thing as butter.

**SHUSTER:** Did you have any kind of capacity for refrigeration?

**TROBISCH:** Yes, we had a refrigerator that ran with kerosene.

[Cassette tape of the original interview runs out and is flipped to the other side.]

**SHUSTER:** This is a continuation of the interview.

**TROBISCH:** Yes, I remember we finally, I finally got a refrigerator that you could put kerosene in and that made it cold. But we could only use it part of the time because our allowance was not enough to cover the cost of the kerosene. So when we knew we were having guests, then we turned it on so we would have cold water. But we also got along without it.

**SHUSTER:** Of course, Cameroon was a French colony at this time.

**TROBISCH:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** Did you have any kind of contact at all with the colonial government?

**TROBISCH:** Yes. It was no longer a French colony. It was a German colony. And the French took it over after the First World War and made it a manda...mandat [sic]. Is that how you say? So they did not have the same power as a colony, but they gave....

**SHUSTER:** A manda...oh, a mandate.

**TROBISCH:** Mandate. That's right, a mandate. Yes. We were not allowed to begin in this territory until the first French commandant had arrived, and we had to work together with him very closely. And that was our only social contact, was this single French commandant, who would invite us once and while to his home for a meal. And I often invited him to ours. I can remember one evening I had fixed, what, about the best kind of dinner you could with what we had, and I looked in the ice box and I had eight bottles of cold water. And at the end of that dinner, the three of us, all eight bottles of cold water were drunk. Because it was so hot, that, like Walter said the only time you were not thirsty was when the glass was on your lips. That would have been a great danger for any children. We did not have any children for four years, much to our great sorrow, and I have often thought afterwards, probably a child could not have taken that...that heat. And a French doctor said it's the greatest danger, of dehydration. And when we did have our baby, I would pour a bucket of water on the cement floor in the noon hour, just to get some....

**SHUSTER:** Make it moist.

**TROBISCH:** And it would be gone in an hour. It was all evaporated, it was that...that hot.

**SHUSTER:** What kind of things did the African mothers do to...for their children to make it more...?

**TROBISCH:** They tried to keep their children out of the sun, in the shade. I remember whenever they would walk with their child, carry their child here, they'd put a little gourd on top of the head of the child in order to keep the sun off. And then the baby was constantly nursed, and so....

**SHUSTER:** You say you had to work...you were required to work very closely with the French governor or provincial officer.

**TROBISCH:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** How so? What kind of things did you have to...?

**TROBISCH:** Well, he was...he had to give us permission, first of all, to have this mission station. And we had to run it in accordance with his wishes.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**TROBISCH:** And they wanted very much for us to have a school, what they called an industrial school, so our successors...he was an industrial school teacher and he built a building and taught some of these young men how to be mechanics and that was...that was a good thing for the area.

**SHUSTER:** Did they...did the colonial government have anything to say about your Christian activities, about your religious instruction? Or was that...?

**TROBISCH:** No, as long as we lived in peace, as we did not create trouble.

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**TROBISCH:** I remember the French Commandant telling us at the beginning to be very careful with the king. It was a known fact that the king did have slaves at a time when slavery was, you know, quote "not allowed." And in fact, one of our finest young men, who became a Christian, was officially... his father was officially, a slave of the *Lamido* [traditional ruler]. And so when the *Lamido* found out about Musa's conversion, he disappeared, and he was put....

**SHUSTER:** Musa disappeared?

**TROBISCH:** Musa disappeared. And we heard then where he was. He...he was in prison. Musa later escaped and went to another territory. But I remember the commandant saying, "Don't meddle with this. Leave this alone." And, of course, we did. But we tried to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves [Matthew 10:16]. And the main thing is that they were free inside.

**SHUSTER:** Of course, since that time you've traveled a great deal, to other parts of Africa. Looking back on your experience in the Cameroons, does it seem anything that was unique to the Cameroons or to the West African church? Ways in which it was different, perhaps, from the church in other parts of Africa or something unique about their experiences?

**TROBISCH:** One thing we noticed, the difference in the West African savannah, where the people grew up in the open plains, to the difference in the virgin forest was that people were so much more outright, forthright, there....

**SHUSTER:** In...?

**TROBISCH:** Where there was no forest. Where there was a forest, we found that among our students, our college students later on, they thought there was a ghost behind every tree. And...and there was this certain deviation of character in the virgin forest area, that was not in the area where we worked. And we found a great difference too, in the diets. In our area they ate corn, or *douer* [?],

which was like millet, something that grew in the sun. And this gave them a healthier diet. There were fewer miscarriages. You would often find a mother who had eight healthy children and hadn't lost any. While you would rarely find that in the virgin forest. Maybe they had three or four, but they had lost that many. And I often thought it certainly had something to do with them eating only root crops...root crops. You know, and not having that sun. That's just an observation that I've found. They were very artistic, these people in Tchollire. They made beautiful mats. I don't have much here in this room, but upstairs you will see that, carvings, perhaps more so than in East Africa. Oh, and that depended on the tribe...

**SHUSTER:** Sure.

**TROBISCH:** ...and how they'd been taught.

**SHUSTER:** Sure. 'Course then, after your experiences in the village, you and your husband went to the college in Southern Cameroon. What stands out most in your memory from your time there?

**TROBISCH:** Was the fact that forty different tribes of Africans could live and work together in harmony. And their extreme diligence in their studies. The greatest punishment that any of these students could have was to be expelled from class, for an hour or for a day. That was the absolute greatest. And I've never seen students work so hard, anyplace. And some of them were...were outstanding, as they went on to Europe and they were the top of the class. One of Walter's students had the highest graduation honors in France, when he went there. Could speak French better than the Frenchmen. And Walter taught German for six years and he would have the same students over a period of four years. And he said, "When does any missionary, any pastor, have that privilege of teaching the same young men, you know, four or five hours a week, over a period of four years." And it was those young men that he taught in school. And I know he taught them well because they learned German, very, very well. But they also learned to be evangelists. One of those young men became the director of Libamba, which he has been now for many many years.

**SHUSTER:** His name is?

**TROBISCH:** Is Emmanuel Njock. He is...

**SHUSTER:** Jo..?

**TROBISCH:** ...Njock. And he's now, he's on the official board for Wycliffe Bible Translators, and he will retire and do that now full time. But he is...he has changed all of Cameroon through his testimony. He was a son of a chief. Another of these young men was John Banjalck [?] and he became the first African marriage counselor. We brought him to Germany, he lived with us, he married a fine Cameroonian lady who took nurses training in Germany, and since 1968 they have faithfully worked in Douala, Cameroon. In marriage guidance. And he has taught all over French speaking Africa.

**SHUSTER:** So he was the first African marriage counselor ever?



**TROBISCH:** In that...in the French-speaking territory, I do not know about East Africa where the British...but we didn't find them. Wherever missionaries heard about John, they asked Walter, "Where did you find a man like that? One you can trust, that you can also support and watch his work grow." And I think it came because he came into our home when he was twelve, thirteen, went in and out of our home, he became the godfather of one of our sons, and has been like a family member. Everything that Walter knew he taught him, he trusted him, and he spent almost four years studying in Europe. And here too, he had a great testimony. So that was our aim was to pull out these gifted dependable leaders and make them effective and go back. It's a great joy for me to go back to Cameroon. I go to Yaoundé. Any of the ministries, you will find these sons there. The ambassador of Cameroon to the United States, Mr. Ponde [?] was a graduate of Libamba. And he is very effective in Washington, in his Christian ambassador or embassy group that is sponsored by...

**SHUSTER:** Campus Crusade?

**TROBISCH:** Campus Crusade. And I hear good things. My oldest daughter, Kathryn, who was born when we were in Tchollire, is married to a diplomat. And they have now been at several different posts. They are now at Washington. And that's a great thrill for them to see the effects of this ministry as it now comes into the present day. So I think God gave us a unique opportunity to, first of all, to go to the grassroots level and discover where people were having their problems. And then to go and teach school where you could say it was the finest minds of French speaking West Africa came to this college. And we would not have been prepared for the one if we had not first done our bush work. Many teachers came right out of a, you know, European atmosphere, and they didn't understand them. And they didn't...maybe they didn't respect. Walter said, "Sometimes the American missionaries, they treat these Africans all as if they would be college honors students." He said, "They're not." He said, "I treat them the same way I treat my youth groups back in Germany. You have to be tough on them sometimes and you have to draw the line and they learn discipline and then, and then things happen."

**SHUSTER:** What was the...you mentioned a little bit about some of the other missionaries. What was the relationship between missionaries in Cameroon? Between different missions?

**TROBISCH:** We had a wonderful opportunity at Cameroon Christian College where twenty-five different missionaries.... Most of them were either French, from France or Switzerland (speaking French), a few American missionaries, and since we were a cross-cultural couple (I as an American, my husband as an European, and he was the college chaplain), we could sort of listen into both camps and be a bridge between them. And, I think those six years there were good years of working together. There were six African teachers and their wives who were included in this fellowship. We had fellowship every Sunday afternoon at the home of the director. And I remember one this...that Walter started was, outside of a short Bible study, every Sunday afternoon it was one person's turn to tell the story of their life.

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** How they got where they did. And we were just amazed at the miracles that were behind these different people. Some were almost too bashful to do it...

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** ...but went then [?] and that worked, that worked out very well. And then our children all played together, and a lot of interaction there.

**SHUSTER:** Did you have...were there also Roman Catholic missionaries in the area?

**TROBISCH:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** Did you have any kind of contacts with them?

**TROBISCH:** We had...in central Cameroon they did a lot of working together when it came to translation work, they had some good linguists and they were able to work with the Catholics in putting out the different scriptures together. And we found that, that our mission as it developed to be family life mission, that the Catholic missionaries were far more open to this message of family life than many of the Protestants.

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** Uh-huh. There was not such a dichotomy between physical and spiritual.

**SHUSTER:** Hmm. That's interesting.

**TROBISCH:** Now, so that been...that was the greatest joy of our latter years, I think, was this going across the denominational barriers when you have a message on family.

**SHUSTER:** Did you find while you were in the Cameroons...in Cameroon, that any kind of the theological or doctrinal disputes in the various...in America, in the various European sending countries affected the church in Cameroon? For example, in the United States, splits between liberals and Fundamentalists?

**TROBISCH:** Our...our African Christians in Tchollire didn't even know that they were Lutherans. And fortunately, there was about six different Lutheran groups, so they could have their own Bible school, schools together. But I don't think the name even appeared. Now it does, of course, but it was very non-essential. Can you pray? Do you know the Lord? It's this. And I think our Lutheran missionaries were blessed by coming out of the revival and the renewal movement. They knew why they were there. And you propagate what you have experienced. So, at least what we experienced in Cameroon was a very good, growing, wonderful church.

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** Uh-huh. And I think it's solid, it's solid today.

**SHUSTER:** What about yourself? How were you, or were you, changed by your years in Cameroon? And if so, how?

**TROBISCH:** I look back on those twelve very busy years, they were the years in which my five children were born, and that was certainly a great place to be a mother.

**SHUSTER:** Why?

**TROBISCH:** Because the Africans never scold you if you have children like they do in Germany, or, or the States. In fact, I remember the chief coming to me when my fifth child was born and saying, "Madame, you must be the happiest woman in Libamaba, because you have another child and because your mother-in-law is living with you. Walter's mother escaped from East Germany and she lived with us. And so she actually taught German, in French, too, for three years. And she helped in the care for these little ones that I had. And she taught me very much about the dignity of children. So I...

**SHUSTER:** How do you mean...?

**TROBISCH:** ...I was changed through...through that.

**SHUSTER:** How do you mean scold? They'd...you'd be scolded in the United States of America for...or the United States or Europe for having children?

**TROBISCH:** Well, I should...when I came on furlough we went first to Germany, and I didn't realize that I committed a great crime of bringing five children into the world. That was the way they treated me in Germany. It wasn't quite that bad here, but, you know was certainly against the norm.

**SHUSTER:** Even more, because you had more children than usual?

**TROBISCH:** Yes, yes. And I just felt so surely that each one of these children was God's gift and it was also called into life. And I still think so today. I think it's probably the greatest thing I've done with my life so far was give birth to my fifth child. 'Could have said "no." And I am sure that God has already used her life and will continue. And she seems to have a special affinity for Africa.

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** Uh-huh. She was back in the hospital in which she was born and worked there several months last year. And she loved Africans, and they...I think they loved and respected her. And she's gone with me on teaching trips, teaching. We teach together family life, natural family planning. That's...I have learned so much from the Africans that I want to come back and shout to Americans, "Come on friends, get with it." They have something to teach us about respect for life, respect for family, respect for elders. And another thing is, it's very nice to grow old in Africa. I think I've been back at least every second year, you know, on a teaching trip. And I find that although I'm in my sixties now, that that is a plus and not a minus. Now they will listen in a...in a new way. So I think we need to learn those things. As you see, I am an Africa lover [chuckles].

**SHUSTER:** One other quick question, I notice that you mention that when you were in Paris studying, you had mentioned you met Dawson Trotman, of the Navigators.

**TROBISCH:** Yes, yes.

**SHUSTER:** How do you remember him? How would you describe his personality?

**TROBISCH:** First word I think of, he was an extremely orderly, neat (neat in the sense of everything in order), outgoing, he had a plan. I was able to help him get his first man started there, showed him the students that we had, I did some letters for him, I remember. I had great respect for him and for his ministry. And in the years since then I've met his men, the Navigators, all over the world. I think that, when I think of the effective missionaries, I think of the couple David and Sherri [?] Hall, who were in Ghana. I did some seminars for them before that in East Africa. And I don't think I have ever seen any place more effective outreach than that couple has done. And I asked one of the Ghanians, I said, "What's the secret of their ministry?" when I was there. This was a man that was very high in the government. And he said, "Ingrid, it's because they are so very human. They are just who they are." They lived there, they invited the...there's a wonderful medical school there in Ghana and I think they just decimated [chuckles] that medical school with Christianity, even the professors, and it was because of their family life. Their home was open, the way they talked, and so when I think of Dawson Trotman and David and Sherri [?] Hall as products of that ministry...

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** ...they are, I would say liberated, much more liberated than many of the early Navigators were, in their family life. I think that was....

**SHUSTER:** How do you mean that?

**TROBISCH:** I meant, we ran across that often in our marriage seminars, a husband's role was all-important, and the wife, you know, was back, maybe at home...

**SHUSTER:** Three steps behind.

**TROBISCH:** ...to be supportive. Yeah, three steps behind. But they had not yet learned the essence of couple power. And that...that's what my message is all about. Releasing couple power. Getting, you know, the man and the woman together working. Someone said, when we spoke the last time together, and that was at the University of New Guinea in Borako, and he said, "You know, what you say is nothing revolutionary, what you and Walter say. But we have never seen a couple stand up and say it together."

**SHUSTER:** Hmm.

**TROBISCH:** "He said something, you said something. And it was, you know, each one was...was supporting the other." And I had that experience recently with my son Daniel, in Vancouver. And I said, "Daniel, how are we going to do this?" You know, that's very unusual for a mother and son to be on the same program. How can we do it without getting in each other's way. "Oh," he said, "It's very simple." He said, "I will listen to all that you say, and think how I can complement it with my message, and you will listen to the Holy Spirit when I am speaking, and if I'm missing some points, I mean, you will add that." And I think that's what God wants. Because a man alone can't do it. A

woman alone can't do it. You know, God created man and woman in his image. It's a theme I'm working on now, it's the feminine and the masculine aspects of God, which are really within each one of us if we develop them. It would make our church so much more human, wouldn't it? So much more attractive.

**SHUSTER:** Well....

**TROBISCH:** So much more of a missionary church when we understood that.

**SHUSTER:** One thinks of the images of God in Proverbs and some images of the hen and others of the masculine.

**TROBISCH:** Yes, yes. Yeah, if you can help me on that, I've got an article that...hatching on the feminine aspects of God and I've found it's much easier...I've always loved the Father God and that picture, and that would be easier to write on than the mother aspects. But one of our pastors in Germany said that, "The older we become, the more fatherly women become and the more motherly men become." And that's great because both are attributes in godliness. That's what I would like to continue to work on as long as I have breath and life.

**SHUSTER:** Let me ask you one other quick question. Now you were in Cameroon until 1963?

**TROBISCH:** That's right.

**SHUSTER:** Did you have any contact at all with the evangelistic crusades that Billy Graham held in Africa in 1960?

**TROBISCH:** It was in Nigeria, I believe, wasn't it?

**SHUSTER:** It was in Nigeria. I guess it was mainly sub-Sahara Africa, so he didn't come to Cameroon.

**TROBISCH:** No, no. We just heard about them, and I don't recall...I...I was not there. I mean a trip from Cameroon to Nigeria is about like getting from California to New York, you know, as far as traveling. But I know we heard many good things and that that was the beginning of a different kind of missionary.

**SHUSTER:** How do you mean?

**TROBISCH:** I think that was only possible at that level because of what we had been doing at the grassroots level.

**SHUSTER:** You mean evangelistic...mass evangelistic campaigns were only possible because....

**TROBISCH:** Yes. Yes, yes. I mean so that that...and all the faithful missionaries that had been there before, so that they prepared the way so that people knew, you know, "What is this message?"

**SHUSTER:** Uh-huh.

**TROBISCH:** And I still believe, as my husband said that, "The greatest number in the kingdom of God is the number one." Jesus was the one-on-one man. And when you work with one person and he is completely changed in his life. And I think of Emmanuel Njock, this leader that Walter spent so many hours with as his...as his spiritual guide and leader. And he'd put him out, take him with him on evangelistic outreaches, and they would get so excited and say, "Now we want to take that back to Germany, can we go and tell them?" It was...it was great.

**SHUSTER:** How did you mean "a new kind of missionary"? You said that you thought that this was the beginning of "a new kind of missionary."

**TROBISCH:** You mean Billy Graham's...?

**SHUSTER:** Well, that's what...you had mentioned you thought this as being "a new kind of missionary."

**TROBISCH:** Yes.

**SHUSTER:** In what...in what sense?

**TROBISCH:** Well, I'm just thinking back. My father landed in Nigeria in 1919. Okay. Got on a river boat. There was maybe one little dot of a mission station here and one little dot there and then absolutely nothing, you know. So all that went before. If Billy Graham had come out in 1919 people would have just looked at him. I mean, that's what I meant. That was the forerunner, that was the pioneer, if you please. To prepare the way. The pioneer was the one that took his bush knife and hacked his way through the jungle. I mean, that's what we did, literally. And then after that others can come. They stand on our shoulders. And then...and then great things happen.

**SHUSTER:** One sows, another...

**TROBISCH:** That's right.

**SHUSTER:** ...another pulls in the harvest.

**TROBISCH:** And one is not greater than the other. I mean, it's a question of being obedient. I see my life as I ask every day, "Lord, help me to be in the right place at the right time doing the right thing." Some people are always doing the right thing but at the wrong time. And that's what I hope to...to do.

**SHUSTER:** Any final comments you'd like to add before we conclude today?

**TROBISCH:** Well, the world has become very small. And as I think about these thoughts that I haven't thought of for years, I can see that the hearts of these first Christians are like the hearts of those Christians in Indonesia, in New Guinea. They have the same needs. The human heart has the same needs regardless of the skin color. And for me personally, I think the older I become the more

merciful I see our Father God and how He does want all men to know this love. And He will use messengers of love. Far more than He will use messengers of judgement. You know what I mean? I mean....

**SHUSTER:** To draw all people unto Himself.

**TROBISCH:** Yes, yes. "I...if I be lifted up, I will draw all people" (John 12:32).

**SHUSTER:** Well, I just want to thank you very much for this interview, for being willing to talk to me, and for wanting to contribute these memories from you and your husband's experiences so that they can be used by other Christians.

**TROBISCH:** Thank you, Bob. I hope it will be of some use. That's a....

**END OF TAPE**

