

Our language is our cultural heritage

By Zarissa Windzak



Surinamese writer Novilia Tawjoeram

Surinamese writer Novilia Tawjoeram recently debuted with her book “Conversating in Caraïb”. She calls the publishing of her book a serious attempt to helping Indigenous youngsters to remember their cultural heritage. According to Novilia the youngsters leave their home village at a certain age and travel to the country’s capitol for further education. In leaving the village they often forget the language of their people.

“I decided to write this book after noticing how many of my brothers and sisters seem to have forgotten their native language. Also the thinning of the number of tribe languages urged me to start writing”, says Novilia. Even though Novilia belongs to a different tribe, called the Arrowak, she decided to contact a Caraïb woman to learn more about the language. “I myself don’t understand the language whatsoever. Not even my own tribe’s language. But that’s because I am like all the youngster who had to move to the city”. In Suriname youngsters, who live in villages located in the interior, have leave their village at a certain age for further education in the city, because there are no secondary schools in the interior of the country.

“The youngster are often likely to forget their roots because of all the western influences in the city. After some time they start forgetting certain words. In the villages the language is still spoken, but you’ll probably only hear the elders speaking it. They’re the ones who have lived in the village their entire life”, Novilia continues. In order to write the book she started interviewing and hearing out her Caraïb friend Bernadett about the language. It took her about two years to finally finish the book. Now it’s being sold in all the bookstores in the city.

The book “Conversating in Caraïb” is written in three different languages. Dutch, because that’s the language spoken in Suriname. English, because Novilia hopes foreigners would show interest in her book and of course Caraïb for her people to start learning. Novilia also included an audio disc for readers to work on their pronunciation of the words. “Soon I want to start with my second book. And that’ll certainly be about conversating in Arrowak”, Novilia says.